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Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Thomas Reeves Tests the Character of JFK

James Fishkin Takes Liberalism to Its Limits

Richard Neuhaus Goes From Pulpit to Polling Place

Allan Carlson Visits Lake Wobegon

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Restoring an American Consensus

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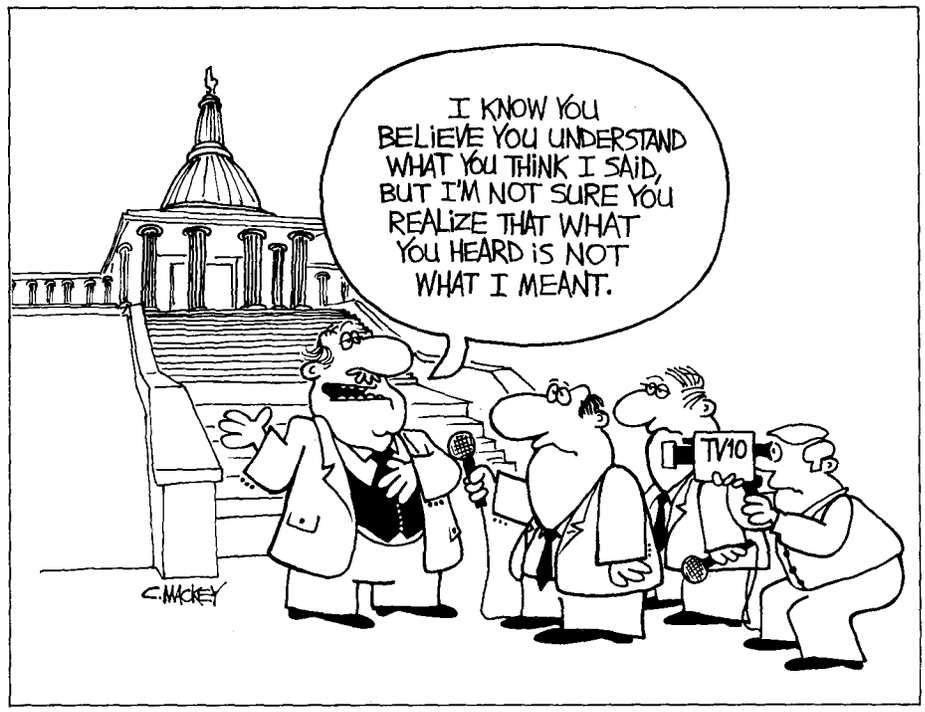
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TV10
C. MACKEY

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Even in our country, Newspeak seems to be taking hold. Tax increases are called "revenue enhancements," and advocates of increased government control are called "progressive" or "liberal." Meanwhile, departments in Washington maintain an average of 15 files on every American.

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1844

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BACK IN PRINT

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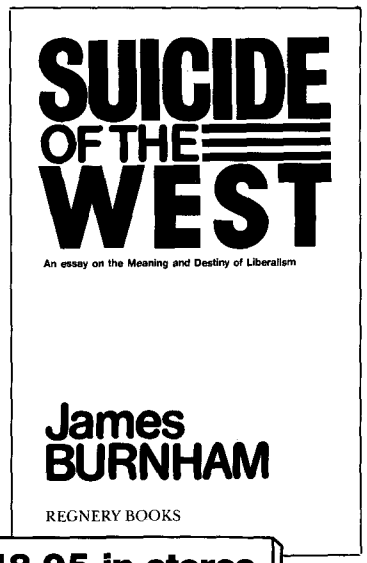

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A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE
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A poet laureate of the United States has been named: Robert Penn Warren. In Britain the poet laureate is appointed by the Queen's ministers, which makes the choice a political question. Asking why Mrs. Thatcher's conservative government appointed Ted Hughes is like asking why she chose to destroy the D'Oyly Carte opera or proposed (allegedly) to eliminate the Regius Professors of Greek. But here in the U.S. we shall never know Ronald Reagan's taste in poetry (Robert Service has been dead for some time), since the selection has been made by Daniel Boorstin, Librarian of Congress. An act of Congress has authorized Mr. Boorstin to name our national poet. The Library of Congress sees it as only a change in name. Since 1937, the Library has had a consultant in poetry—a position held by poets good (Robert Frost, Conrad Aiken) and indifferent (Stephen Spender—not even a bl--dy American!). Until recently, the honor of American verse was upheld by a good woman from Illinois, Gwendolyn Brooks, the first black woman in the position. Her retirement is the occasion of the "name change."

Fortunately for the American people, Daniel Boorstin had the taste and discretion to pick one of our best living poets. Robert Penn Warren was an almost inevitable choice, since he has received almost every other literary honor in the U.S. Equally distinguished as a poet and novelist, Mr. Warren also represents two of the great literary regions of the U.S.: born in Kentucky and educated at Vanderbilt, he chooses to live in New England as a Connecticut Yankee. The American people were fortunate in having Mr. Boorstin as Librarian at this critical time. But what will happen when someone less responsible inevitably becomes Librarian of Congress? Then as our national poet we shall have to endure an academic flatfoot writing verse in fibrillating rhythm and congested syntax addressed to whatever student he happens to have his eye on this week.

It may be unwise for a republic, like the United States, to have a poet laureate, especially at a time when there is so little agreement. We are no longer certain about what constitutes serious poetry, and many of our citizens apparently have no idea of just what it means, being an American. A republican laureate ought to be someone historically inevitable, like Vergil. Instead, he is more likely to be a court flunky of the type that continues to degrade the profession of letters at colleges and PEN conferences. After the Revolution, the American people foreswore all notions of title and degree. We did away with royal crowns and ducal coronets, whether wisely or not it is still hard to say but we did it. A republican laureate is something like a congressional court jester—a position filled admirably by the current Speaker of the House. We could do far worse (probably shall) than to designate the Honorable Mr. O'Neill as Warren's successor.

You can lead a horse to water. . . . A study concluded in January by the Physicians Task Force on Hunger at the Harvard School of Public Health has perplexed a lot of North Dakotans. The study found that 11 North Dakota counties were among 150 U.S. counties where people are starving and have restricted access to food stamps. These "hunger counties" were defined as those where more than a fifth of the residents live below the current Federal poverty level of $10,609 for a family of four, and where fewer than a third of those eligible receive food stamps.

Strangely, 13 of the 24 states containing "hunger counties" are in the food-producing Mississippi Valley and Great Plains. "I've felt for years that people in this state for whatever reason are a little more reticent about going in and applying for (welfare) programs. . . . Maybe it's the rural background," explained the director of economic assistance for the North Dakota Department of Human Services in an AP story.

The director of human services for Bowman and Slope counties complained, "People are proud. If there is some way they can make it, they will." Slope county, population 1,157, has the 13th worst hunger problem in the nation, according to the Harvard report. Hettinger county, next door, was ranked 15th.

The authors of the study attributed the "problem" to a weak food-stamp program, but residents of the North Dakota "hunger counties" have exhibited a surprising and, well, ungracious attitude about the study. Interviewed for local and national TV and newspaper stories, these folks said they knew all about food stamps and would drive into town to get them if they wanted them—*but they don't want them.* They raise most of their own food and just don't need to spend much on groceries. They're happy; they get enough to eat; and they want to be left alone—a bureaucrat's nightmare.

—*Jane Greer*

Religious education in America goes back a long way. Harvard and Yale were both founded as religious institutions, but church-supported colleges are under increasing pressure to hire faculty members on any basis *other* than church affiliation. Congress did grant denominational colleges an exemption from the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* lists six states in which lawsuits and proposed regulations are whittling away at more than the edges of this exemption. Loyola University of Chicago is now embroiled in a lawsuit for its decision to fill three philosophy positions with Jesuits, even though it has a good record of hiring non-Catholics. Loyola

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administrators are worried about maintaining a "critical mass" of Jesuits necessary to maintain the institution's identity. Marquette in Wisconsin is engaged in a similar court battle involving its education department.

Texas is the only state in the Union that still permits church-supported Bible chairs at its universities, but Texas Attorney General James Mattox is out to change that. Last September Mattox advised North Texas State that its plan to add church-sponsored religion instructors to the faculty was unconstitutional. Critics of existing Bible chairs were not slow to take the hint and began challenging existing programs. From the way in which academic bureaucrats are jumping on the Mattox bandwagon, it is pretty clear that religious education in any form will soon disappear from state universities in Texas. They're not "academically respectable," sniffed the assistant to the state Commissioner of Higher Education. (We wonder if his degree, probably "education," is academically respectable.) Texas education is so respectable that its state Teachers Association unsuccessfully petitioned a judge to forbid competency testing. My goodness, they know they're competent (so does the assistant commissioner, we'll bet). Besides, competency is just a code word for religion: over in South Carolina, graduates of the Fundamentalist Bob Jones score much higher on the NTE than ed. majors from any state university. Religious teachers can at least read the Bible.

Texas is a free country, and the voters will have a chance to get rid of Mattox next election—well, maybe. A coalition of critics have organized the People's Political Action Committee to defeat him, but the most likely candidate, State Senator J.E. "Buster" Brown, has been declared ineligible by the state court of appeals. Mattox, obviously fond of volunteering unsolicited advice, was the first legal mind to suggest Brown was ineligible because he voted on a pay raise for state officials. The attorney general's press secretary described the People's PAC as a "radical, right-wing fringe group that doesn't represent the vast majority of Texans." Maybe so, but if they're all so fired up about majority rule, Texas legal bureaucrats are working overtime to make sure it doesn't apply either to schools or the attorney general's race. Does anyone, apart from the incompetent teachers lobby, oppose competency testing? Do a majority of Texans actually like paying taxes so much that they object to a couple of free Bible chairs? Rendering unto Caesar is a great idea so long as his first name isn't Caligula or Gallienus.

The 1985-86 freshman class is the most conservative group of college students in years, according to the latest survey published by the American Council on Education and the University of California at Los Angeles. Among the new college students surveyed—almost 200,000—nearly 21 percent now call themselves "conservative" or "far right," a new high in the 20-year history of the survey. Yet examination of student attitudes on key social and political issues reveals that this upsurge in student conservatism may be more apparent than real.

Almost three-quarters of those surveyed feel that the rich should pay more taxes, and two-thirds want a national health-care plan. Over half approved of forced busing, and almost half believed that couples should live together before marriage. Over 90 percent want job equality for women, and slightly more than half approve of legal abortion. Only one issue—the legalization of marijuana—showed any discernible conservative shift, with support for legalization falling to only one-fifth of those surveyed. Even allowing for an apparent skewing of the survey questions (why no questions on school vouchers, for instance, or on raising the personal tax exemption?), this hardly looks like high tide for undergraduate conservatism.

Kenneth C. Green, one of the authors of the survey report, noted the disparity between the apparent climb in "conservatism" and the liberal attitudes on specific issues: "It may be that the term liberal has fallen a little bit in esteem. . . . There is a national movement of certain political issues to the mainstream. What at one time was liberal now becomes mainstream."

Does this also mean that, having triumphed on almost every social and political issue on campus, liberalism has at last added the label "conservative" to its catalog of trophies? There may be a simpler explanation. In the past, even entering freshmen knew better than to describe sexual anarchy and big government as "conservative" or even "middle-of-the-road." These days, they are lucky to be able to spell conservative, much less know what it means. Another victory for government education. cc

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Tax Revolt: The Battle for the Constitution by Martin A. Larson, Greenwich, CT: Devin-Adair, $16.95. A spirited attack on the IRS and a chronicle of the defiant (if foolhardy) souls who would rather throw out the 1040 Form than the Constitution.

The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume III, September 1920-August 1921, edited by Robert A. Hill, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, $38.50. Nearly 800 pages of letters and documents—filled with details of factional disputes, petty ambition, and frustrated intrigue—covering one year in the life of a flamboyant 20th-century black leader who preached "racial purity," black capitalism, and the repatriation of blacks to Africa.

Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement by James Farmer, New York: Arbor House, $16.95. An associate of Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy retells the story of the Freedom Rides and the Civil Rights Movement. Farmer was shrewd enough to argue against an "unconditional Black commitment" to the Democratic Party. Still a maverick, he is one of the few national black leaders to support Jesse Jackson.

Arresting Abortion: Practical Ways to Save Unborn Children, The Rutherford Institute Report, Volume 4, edited by John W. Whitehead, Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, $5.95. Eight contributors ponder ways to stop the slaughter of the unborn, with helpful suggestions on picketing, counseling, letter-writing.

Unmasking the New Age by Douglas R. Groothuis, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, $6.95. A theological and philosophical critique of a potent and anti-Christian new synthesis of quantum physics, Buddhism, and popular psychology.

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ROCK 'N' ROLL NEVER FORGETS: HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE 60'S

by Thomas Fleming

In 1985 the senior members of the baby boom generation turned 40. Many of them are surprised to be still around. The films and songs of the 50's and 60's were so full of "disorder and early sorrow" that it was, perhaps, no surprise how many real-life actors and singers, who took the place of soldiers and athletes in the national pantheon, did their best to quit the scene before embarrassing us with their gray hair and boring reminiscences of the good old days: James Dean, Buddy Holly, John Lennon, Elvis Presley.

> Some with lives that came to nothing
> Some with deeds as best undone
> Death came tacitly and took them
> Where they never see the sun.

Nineteen eighty-five was inevitably the year of the yuppie, now that "sweet sixteen is turning thirty-one." More significantly, it was the year of Bloomington, Indiana, which saw the departure of *The American Spectator* for foreign parts and the return of John Cougar Mellencamp. Mr. Mellencamp symbolized his gesture by helping to organize the FarmAid Concert in the fall. He also released an album tribute to the embattled American farmer, *Scarecrow*, which included a #1 hit, "Small Town." In the middle of the concerts on his winter tour, Mellencamp made a graceful little pitch on behalf of the family farm, and in Rockford, at least, his performance of "Small Town" seemed to move the adolescent audience with something approaching patriotic fervor.

Like most of his generation, Mellencamp has been through a great deal. Rock music has borne witness to the wholesale rebellion against everything American: drugs, free sex, social protest. Mellencamp himself no longer does drugs—doesn't even drink, he tells his audience—and his protesting is confined to a defense of Middle American values that might have won a prize in a 4H essay contest. But why or how it all happened (what is sometimes called "the 60's thing"), neither he nor anyone else can say.

An older generation that survived World War II and the music of Irving Berlin liked to blame it all on "the kids." Perhaps they were correct, but in looking back on the 1960's it is hard to recall a single institution that did not betray its ideals and purpose—"the army, the navy, the church, and the stage," all seemed to fall into the hands of their natural enemies. It was a decade ushered in by a President who entertained a Mafia prostitute in the White House, while inviting the citizenry to bear any burden and pay any price; when the Catholic Church undertook to "ruin the great work of time"; when the armed forces of the United States were reorganized by the creator of the Edsel and sent into combat by bureaucrats who lied to us every night on the evening news.

If "the kids" were really to blame, it is a strange fact that the nation's leaders had all ripened to maturity in those halcyon years after the Second World War, the golden age of Eisenhower.

Now that we are passing through a second bourgeois reconstruction, an 80's remake of the 50's, we are increasingly eager to ponder the significance of the postwar years. Yalta and Potsdam are still being debated by scholars and journalists, with all the grave sincerity of a Jacobite toasting the "King" over the punch bowl, and there are conservatives who look at the 1950's as the best thing this side of paradise. The children watched *Leave It to Beaver* on 21-inch-screen television sets in their suburban homes. They were taken to Little League practice and Sunday school and Cub Scouts. They listened to the good, wholesome music of Frank Sinatra on the radio, and on Sunday

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night the family all gathered together to watch the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

As we have suggested before, the 1950's were more an experiment than a return to normalcy. Among the postwar leadership there was a desire to recreate the world of Norman Rockwell in a suburban setting. Planners, journalists, politicians, and textbook writers attempted to reinvent the United States as the land of opportunity and equality, democratic process welded to middle-class values. In many ways it was a noble attempt to crystalize the wholesome sentiments of the American people into institutions. In the end, it was the institutions—not the people—that degenerated. The almost 20 years between the end of the war and the election of Lyndon Johnson were, for most people, a good time to be alive, a period of great promise and hope. But as time went on, suburban America proved to be a Potemkin village that would blow away in the first serious storm.

My father would probably have dated the end of the good life to one Sunday night when Elvis Presley appeared on the Sullivan show. After that it was all downhill—liquor, drugs, sex, and spitting on the flag. Maybe so. But in those glorious years, where were the poets, novelists, and philosophers who spoke out for the old order? Hemingway and Faulkner were still around, to be sure, but they were relics of the 30's. Of the writers at the top of their form, John O'Hara and perhaps James Gould Cozzens were the best—not much to build a golden age around.

The most symptomatic writers of the 50's may have been people like Jack Kerouac and Paul Goodman, and neither had much good to say about the era in which they found themselves. Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, a powerful indictment of bourgeois sterility, conveyed some of the agony experienced by adolescent males growing up in a society where the idea of manhood had become cloudy. Goodman saw teenage gangs as omens of a generation that could not learn to grow up. It is pleasant to remember that Russell Kirk realized the significance of Goodman's critique and praised the book.

And then there was Kerouac—not just *a* Beat, but *The Beat*. If ever there was a man who loved this country, this continent, it was the strange, unhappy Canuck who wrote *On the Road*. What some readers interpreted as pointless thrill-seeking was really more of a relentless search for the lost American frontier. In one of his last books, Kerouac complained that you never saw anybody whistling on the street anymore: we were all so busy being cool that we had lost the art of enjoying ourselves without affectation.

The people we most remember from the 50's were revolutionaries like Kerouac, Goodman, and Presley, rather than representatives of the establishment. For all the wholesome charm of the bourgeois decade, there was hardly an *ancien régime* worth overturning, as things turned out. Elvis scandalized our parents on the Sullivan show, but what were they doing letting a man like Ed into their living rooms—a Broadway journalist who reputedly consorted with mobsters? Or listening to singers like Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, both of whom have been linked repeatedly to underworld figures? What sort of cynicism was it that could stomach the sappy sentimentalism of a popular music that had one theme and one only—summed up by Cole Porter's "Let's Do It." When the reputedly bisexual Porter wasn't "doing it" with all and sundry, he was complaining, "I get no kick from cocaine." Elvis only took drugs, he didn't sing about them, and he tried, at least, to stay married to one mate—and a woman, at that.

There *was* a good side to rock 'n' roll. At its best, it represented a healthy reaction against the cheap and tasteless music of Tin Pan Alley songwriters like Irving Berlin. What Stephen Foster was to the 19th century, Berlin has been to the 20th. But while Foster wrote heartfelt songs of the American experience, songs that fit into a long tradition of British and American music-making, Berlin ground out his slick imitations of blues and rags with the regularity and sincerity of a Hong Kong blue-jean factory.

Ideally, rock music was a return to the tradition of Scottish ballads; it was powerful, dramatic, and dealt directly with the big subjects—love and death. (Isolde, brought back to life, might not have liked the music, but she would have understood the themes.) What else explains the successful transplantation of rock music to Britain? Oh, it's popular all over the world, but it is only in England and Scotland that they learned to play the real thing and export it back to America. (The other exceptions—Canada and Australia—prove the rule.)

Rock music, at its best, represented a restoration of authenticity. At its worst—perhaps even its average—it deserves every complaint that has ever been made against it. Most of it is as cheap as Irving Berlin and a whole lot nastier. But in the beginning, it overwhelmed all those suburban teenagers who sensed there had to be something more to life than they showed on *Father Knows Best*. They needed adventure and excitement. Europeans may be content to settle back and enjoy the fruits of civilization, but Americans are still young enough to remember the frontier.

The first generation of suburbanites clearly saw themselves as taking part in the great adventure of taming the wilderness. Unfortunately, they made it too tame. Dad went off to work in his gray flannel suit, while Mom stayed home to cook, clean, and drive the children from one planned activity to another. In these circumstances, a whole lot of unpleasant developments make sense: the feminist movement, the sexual revolution, and the youth rebellion. "Get your kicks on Route 66" was the rock version of *On the Road*. The rootlessness of the suburbs gave way to restlessness: hitchhiking and pointless road trips became routine remedies for boredom: New York, Fort Lauderdale, Yellow Springs, Ohio—anywhere, in fact, but here and always with the radio turned up full blast. Rock 'n' roll was a populist uprising such as this nation had not seen since the great days of William Jennings Bryan. Nothing could stand in its way. Before this onslaught of electric guitar, bass and drums, the Walls of Jericho—so painfully constructed by civics teachers and Sunday school superintendents—came tumbling down.

The musical revolution, like the sterility of American letters and the growing hostility to the cynicism and vulgarity of postwar American life, was a clear sign that something was seriously wrong. The election of John Kennedy, a spoiled rich kid with few qualifications, over a seasoned veteran like Richard Nixon was a desperate

(continued on page 18)

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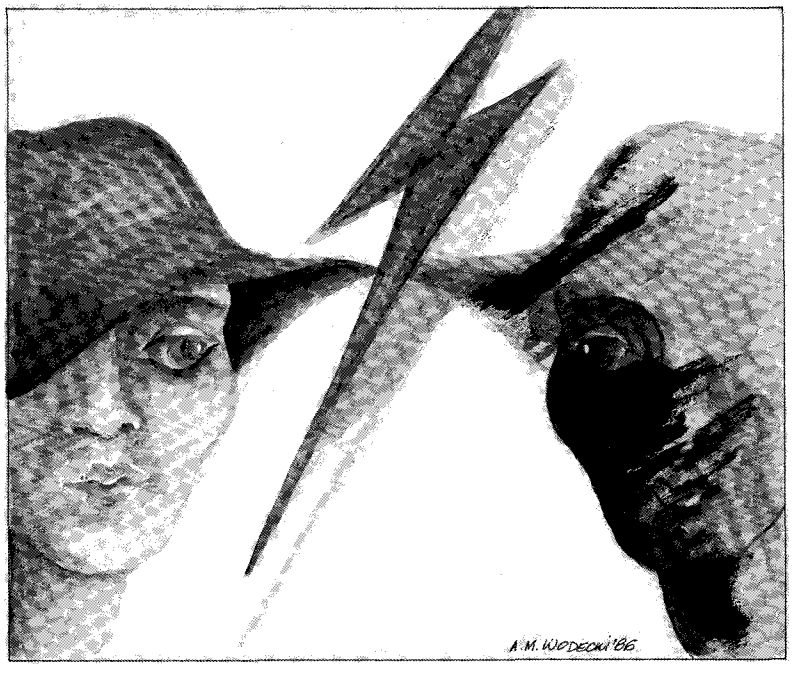
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM *by James S. Fishkin*

The last two decades have seen a remarkable revival in academic political philosophy, particularly in the English-speaking world. A subject which was widely pronounced dead in the 1950's has recently produced thousands of articles and numerous books of real importance. One indicator of the scale of this revival is the length of a recently published annotated bibliography about just one of those books (John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*). It runs to nearly 700 pages, and all the books and articles listed concern a book that was only published in 1971.



This resurgence has been fueled by a single-minded quest for an adequate theory of the just society—a picture of the ideal liberal society which would place all the untidy fragments of the liberal tradition in their appropriate priority relations. Such a theory would give us a clear picture of how we ought to value liberty compared to equal opportunity, compared to individual property rights and other familiar principles. Rather than merely weighing conflicting principles against each other, such an ideal solution would give us a single coherent vision of the just society—one which we should attempt to achieve, or at least approach, in our actual public policies over the long term.

I believe that this quest for a single, adequate *solution* to the theory of justice asks too much. Any reasonable construction of the values central to liberalism will not give us a single utopian vision in clear focus. Rather, it will give us patterns of stark conflict requiring hard choices among fundamental values. It will give us *ideals without an ideal*—conflicting partial visions, each of which would take public policy in an entirely different direction if given further emphasis.

I would like to develop this point by pursuing in detail a key *part* of the theory of justice—the problem of equal opportunity. In this country we have long been more concerned with giving people a fair chance to be unequal than with making them equal, as a matter of final result. If there is a specifically American contribution to the development of Western liberalism, it derives from our preoccupation with equal opportunity.

However, systematic solutions to the problem of equal opportunity lead to clearly illiberal conclusions. We have been blinded to the difficulties in a rigorous theory of the just society by our neglect of one crucial factor—the family and the issues of liberty surrounding it. Once we take full account of the family, our common assumptions about equal opportunity do not add up to a coherent scenario for the just society. Rather, they yield only a pattern of contradictory results, a pattern I call a *trilemma*—roughly, a dilemma with three corners.

This pattern is only disturbing if we expect too much. Despite our lack of a rigorous theory of equal opportunity, we have ample grounds for important substantive conclusions with immediate policy implications. The lack of a rigorous ideal solution does not disarm us from evaluating real problems in the real world.

The trilemma of equal opportunity is a forced choice among three principles. The first principle, *merit*, requires procedural fairness in the evaluation of qualifications for positions and, then, selection of the most qualified. Whether from Civil Service exams, SAT tests, or the NFL draft, the basic idea of meritocratic assignment is widely familiar in this society.

However, meritocratic assignment, by itself, is not enough for a viable theory of equal opportunity. There

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must be some attempt to deal with inequalities in the conditions under which talents and other qualifications develop. The argument can be dramatized with an example which I will borrow from the English philosopher Bernard Williams. In order to acquire some perspective on the educational and job qualifications built into our daily lives, let us imagine a different kind of society—one dominated by a warrior class. The top positions are all occupied by skillful warriors who have perpetuated their positions from one generation to the next. Suppose, however, that advocates of equal opportunity achieve a reform. They decide that admission to the warrior class should, from that point on, be determined by a suitable competition. We might imagine a kind of fighting Olympics designed to select the best warriors.

As it happens, however, the present warriors' children overwhelmingly dominate the competition, so that the reform makes no difference to the outcome. To simplify matters, children from the present warrior class all turn out to be extremely well nourished, while their competitors are so undernourished that they fail in the competition for lack of strength. The competition yields the spectacle of 300-lb. sumo-style wrestlers vanquishing 90-lb. weaklings. Only a cynic could contend that real "equal opportunity" had been achieved. While meritocratic assignment may have been achieved in the sense that the sumo wrestlers actually *are* better warriors, they have been permitted to develop into better warriors under such unequal conditions that the result cannot be presented as fulfilling equal opportunity.

A second principle of equal opportunity is needed to supplement the first. If we can reliably predict that the children of the present warrior class will become the dominant class, that is objectionable, even if they do so by winning a meritocratic competition. *Equality of life chances* requires that the prospects of children for eventual positions in the society should not vary systematically with their arbitrary native characteristics (their family background, race, class, sex, ethnic group, etc.). To the extent that we can predict where they will end up merely by knowing such facts about them (such as that they are children of the present warriors) an identifiable kind of injustice is being perpetuated.

The two principles just mentioned are principles of equality intended to ration fairly the chance to be unequal. But these two principles conflict with a third, one which expresses a kind of liberty central to the liberal tradition (and with broader appeal as well). It is, roughly, the freedom of families, acting consensually, to benefit their children, or what might be called *family autonomy*. Family autonomy does not apply to cases where the consensus within the family has broken down (such as issues of child placement) or to the freedom of families to impose disadvantages or harms on children. Rather, it is the freedom to benefit one's children without coercive interference from the outside (and where, we might hypothesize, there is no real dispute about the benefits inside or outside the family). By family autonomy, then, we mean the least controversial core of family relations. The trilemma shows how this element of liberty (a part of liberty which affects most of our lives more directly than do our other liberties) conflicts with even modest constructions of equality (constructions concerned only with opportunities and not with results), *even under ideal conditions*. The resulting pattern lends plausibility to the notion that liberalism is a kind of continuing dialogue about the conflicts between liberty and equality.

It would not be surprising if our central principles clashed under difficult circumstances—a history of injustice, noncompliance with some of the principles being prescribed, or extreme scarcity where no plausible version of justice was possible. However, the trilemma argument does not require any of these pessimistic assumptions. Let us assume no legacy of injustice from the past; let us assume complete compliance with the principles being proposed; and let us assume only moderate scarcity as in a prosperous industrial society such as our own (rather than the extreme scarcity of, say, the Third World). To be realistic, however, we need one more assumption, namely, that there are inequalities, both social and economic in the adult generation. The point of equal opportunity is to ration chances to be unequal. If there were strict equality of outcomes, then there would be no point in worrying about equal opportunity. Let us assume that there are inequalities of result in the adult generation (background inequalities) of the kind which apply to every modern developed society, capitalist or socialist.

Given background conditions of inequality, implementing any two of these principles—merit, equal life chances, family autonomy—can be expected to preclude the third. It is as if we had a three-cornered stool but only two legs available to hold it up. It doesn't matter which two we pick, but lack of the third is enough to undermine the whole structure (provided that we expect or require a stable structure to begin with). For example, implementing the first and third principles undermines the second. The autonomy of the family protects the process whereby advantaged families differentially contribute to the development of their children. Given background conditions of inequality, children from the higher strata will have been systematically subjected to developmental opportunities that can reliably be expected to advantage them in the process of meritocratic competition. Under these conditions, the principle of merit—applied to talents as they have developed under such unequal conditions—becomes a mechanism for generating unequal life chances.

Suppose one were to keep the autonomy of the family in place but attempt to equalize life chances? Fulfilling the second and third principles would require sacrifice of the first. Given background conditions of inequality, the differential developmental influences just mentioned will produce disproportionate talents and other qualifications among children in the higher strata. If they must be assigned to positions so as to equalize life chances, then they must be assigned regardless of these differential claims. Some process of "reverse discrimination" in favor of those from disadvantaged backgrounds would have to be applied systematically throughout the society if life chances were to be equalized (while also maintaining family autonomy).

Suppose one were to attempt to equalize life chances while maintaining the system of meritocratic assignment? Given background conditions of inequality, it is the autonomy of families that protects the process by which advantaged families differentially influence the development of

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talents and other qualifications in their children. Only if this process were interfered with, in a systematic manner, could both the principles of merit and of equal life chances be achieved. Perhaps a massive system of collectivized child-rearing could be instituted. Or perhaps a compulsory schooling system could be devised so as to even out home-inspired developmental advantages and prevent families from making any *differential* investments in human capital in their children, either through formal or informal processes. In any case, achieving both merit and equal life chances would require a systematic sacrifice in family autonomy.

Implementing any two of these principles precludes the third. While inevitable conflicts might be tolerated by systematic theorists in the nonideal world, these conflicts arise under ideal conditions. Given only moderate scarcity and strict compliance with the principles chosen, given that there is no aftermath of injustice from the immediate past, we are applying these principles in our thought experiment to the best conditions that could realistically be imagined for a modern, developed society.

Of course, liberalism has long been regarded as an amalgam of liberty and equality. And liberals and libertarians have long been fearful of the sacrifices in liberty that would be required to achieve equality of result. Equality of opportunity, by contrast, has been regarded as a weakly reformist, tame principle which avoids such disturbing conflicts. However, even under the best conditions, it raises stark conflicts within the one area of liberty which touches most of our lives most directly. Once we take account of the family, equal opportunity is an extraordinarily radical principle and achieving it would require sacrifices in liberty which most of us would regard as grossly illiberal.

These principles are not demanding by themselves; they are demanding in combination. Each of the trilemma scenarios fully implementing two of the principles leads to drastic sacrifice of the third. One reasonable, but unsystematic response, is to trade off small increments of each without full realization of any.

But this is to live without a systematic solution. The aspiration fueling the renewal of liberal theory has been that some single solution in clear focus can be defined for ideal conditions and then policy can be organized so as to approach this vision gradually. But if trade-offs are inevitable, even for ideal theory, then we have ideals without an ideal, conflicting principles without a single unifying vision.

My position is, first, that equal opportunity offers a prime case for this result: second, that despite the lack of a systematic solution for ideal theory, there are significant policy prescriptions which result without any necessity for solving the priority relations among these principles. We can live with moral conflict and still offer significant prescriptions.

Having sketched the first point, let us turn to the second, the issue of policy implications. There are two kinds of policy implications we can evaluate without having to solve the problem of priority relations among these three principles for ideal theory—without, in other words, employing the model of a single unified and coherent ideal which we should, as best we can, approach through partial realization. The first kind of policy implication may be seen wherever we can achieve a major *improvement* in the realization of one of these values without a major loss in any of the others (or in any other new values which the proposal impinges upon). The second kind of policy implication applies to any proposal that would impose a major *loss* in one of these values without any comparable gain in any of the other values (or in any new values which the proposal impinges upon). The first kind of policy implication is exemplified by all those things we could do, in the second term of the Reagan Administration, to improve equality of life chances, family autonomy, or meritocratic assignment.

We are far from the possibility frontier in achieving any of these values, and, in some cases, we have moved further away rather than closer in recent years. We blithely tolerate the perpetuation of an urban underclass; a whole generation of urban youth is growing up with blighted life chances and with few opportunities to make it into the mainstream economy, and with few policy initiatives now focused on their problem. Family autonomy is protected for middle-class families, but poor families have far greater difficulty in forming and maintaining themselves intact. By neglecting job prospects among the poor, this Administration has also affected the incentives for family formation as well as the ability of poor families to provide essential prerequisites for child development and socialization. We are also far from achieving meritocratic assignment. In my view, discrimination persists against blacks, Hispanics, women, and other minorities. There is no justification for tolerating job discrimination on the basis of arbitrary factors, irrelevant to the roles in question. In other words, despite Mr. Reagan's talk of protecting "the family" and of creating an "opportunity society," his policies have promoted middle-class families and middle-class opportunities at the expense of the disadvantaged.

The second kind of policy implication is exemplified by the major quick-fix for the first set of problems —preferential treatment based *merely* on arbitrary native characteristics. When it is applied in competitive meritocratic contexts, this policy yields a major sacrifice in one of our three values, meritocratic assignment, without a significant gain in any of the others. The difficulty is that preferential treatment, when it is based merely on arbitrary native characteristics, is mistargeted as a policy which could have any effect on equality of life chances. It is mistargeted because, in competitive meritocratic contexts (e.g., admissions to graduate and professional schools), there are strong institutional pressures to accept the most qualified applicants with the specified arbitrary native characteristics. Just as family background provides disproportionate opportunities to develop qualifications among advantaged white children, it does so among relatively advantaged minority children. This policy only serves to widen the gap between the urban underclass and the black middle class—despite the fact that it is typically justified as special consideration for those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My objection does not apply to policies which apply preferential treatment to those who are, actually, from disadvantaged backgrounds. In that case, meritocratic assignment is sacrificed for a gain in equal life chances. Rather, my objection applies to programs which are applied

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merely on the basis of arbitrary native characteristics, so as to reward the most qualified members of the group (who will, as a statistical matter, tend to come from its more advantaged portions). Hence, the irony of the De Funis and Bakke cases. De Funis, a Sephardic Jew from a relatively poor background, was not admitted to the University of Washington Law School, while most of the minority students admitted on the basis of preferential treatment were, apparently, from more advantaged backgrounds (or, at least, were the children of black professionals). On the other hand, the program at the University of California at Davis which the Court struck down in the Bakke case was unusual for having procedures in place to direct special consideration to those who actually came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Theoretically, the program which the Court struck down in *Bakke* was defensible

REVISIONS

Legal Culture

As the 20th century rounds the bend, it is impossible to look back at the steady march of rights trampling on privileges without a sense of astonishment. Was it really only in 1920 that Congress ratified women's suffrage? Has forced busing for integration only been with us for two decades? The revolution in rights has not been an affair of the heart but of legislatures and, especially in the U.S., the courts.

Of the recent philosophers of legal right, none is more influential these days than Ronald Dworkin. Still near the center of Dworkin's attention in *A Matter of Principle* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA) is his insistence (modified over the years but not abandoned) that courts should decide questions not for reasons of policy but on the basis of principle. Judges are not to consider the general welfare or the probable consequences of their decisions; instead, they are to uphold general rights.

Like most fashionable distinctions, there is less than meets the eye. If judges are really forced to choose between the common good and the principle of equality, which is preferable? Is equality before the law, for example, a good *per se*, or is it good because it leads to fair judgments and social harmony?

The fuzziness we sometimes encounter in Dworkin derives from a typically modern refusal to examine first principles, in his case, *rights*. Dworkin insists upon a citizen's "right not to be convicted if innocent."

Even an accidental violation of this right does serious damage in the form of "moral harm." A deliberate injustice constitutes a "special insult to the dignity of the person." These considerations lead Dworkin to propose "two principles of fair play in government": (1) citizens are entitled to equal concern and respect; and (2) enforcements of political decisions must also be equal in impact.

The trouble with this line of reasoning is not so much that it leads to false conclusions, since Dworkin often has sensible things to say on subjects like civil disobedience. Besides, most political theory is—let us be candid—a process of ideological justification. (Tell me a philosopher's party, and I have a fair chance of guessing his political theory.) No, the problem with Dworkin's principles is simply this: rights, as he understands them, simply don't exist, and saying they do—over and over—will never make it so.

You don't need a philosophical theory in order to have a workable legal system. If anything, the reverse is true. Dworkin's view of the courts as a place for settling questions of principle is exactly what we have in the U.S. Britain and France are far more democratic: they settle first principles by elections—a ridiculous method surely, but preferable to judicial *fiat*. Brian Barry, in a penetrating review of Dworkin in the *Times Literary Supplement* points out that judicial imposition of rights, as in *Roe* v. *Wade*, has the effect of straining the social fabric.

Legal theory in the 1980's is a mess, but that is nothing terribly new. As Alan Watson observes in his masterful study, *The Evolution of Law* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore), no one can understand the history of law if he fails to consider the conservatism of lawyers. They will fold, spindle, or mutilate an old law before they will admit it was foolish to begin with. Watson's examples, Roman Contract Law, customary law, and the welcome given to Roman law in the 11th century, illustrate nicely his contention that "law . . . is above all and primarily the culture of the lawyers." They may be created in response to social interests, but once a legal system develops, equity may often be achieved in spite of, rather than because of, written laws.

It does not take a great deal of reflection to conclude that Anglo-American theory is an epiphenomenon of our legal culture. Starting with utterly fantastic notions like "rights" or Austin's concept of law as command, they are compelled to come up with increasingly clever arguments to save appearances. But admit it's all nonsense to begin with? Never. It is rare for a philosophy of law to survive a generation. Austin and Kelsen—where are their disciples now? The great exception, natural law theory, only proves the rule, because natural law was deduced from the nature of things rather than the nature of laws. Watson points out that despite the obvious difficulty of conceptualizing legal ideas, "the elite of lawmakers . . . become so involved with law as law that they often talk of it as if it existed for its own sake, and they cease to regard it . . . as existing for specific societal purposes." No, a philosophy of law is a contradiction in terms, and in America that contradiction has turned the frail intellect of a Judge Garrity or a William O. Douglas into a mortal god. cc

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within our framework, while the program it avoided a decision on in *De Funis* (providing preferential treatment for race as such) would not be.

We should mention one persistent counterargument to this conclusion about preferential treatment. Preferential treatment based merely on race (or on other arbitrary native characteristics) is sometimes supported, not as a remedy for developmental disadvantages in the present, but as a form of *compensation* for injustice in the past. However, the mistargeting objection has force here, as well, but with additional complications.

First, the list of groups which were, historically, victims of discrimination is much broader than the groups now demanding compensation. Consistent pursuit of this argument would produce a host of other ethnic claims—Irish, Polish, and Italian, Catholic as well as Jewish, in addition to the more familiar arguments made on behalf of Hispanics, Native Americans, and Orientals. This proliferation is not fanciful. The Anti-Defamation League discovered one American law school which had not less than 16 racial and ethnic categories for admissions classification.

Second, the very notion of compensation raises conceptual challenges—unacknowledged by its proponents—when applied to this kind of problem. An individual X is supposed to be compensated by returning him to the level of well-being he would have reached, had some identifiable injustice in the past (committed against his forebears) not occurred. In tracing back through the generations, however, it soon becomes clear that X would usually not now exist, were it not for the historical injustice. If we try to imagine the world which would have existed, had the historical injustices not occurred, we cannot return X to the level he would have reached, because he would not have reached any level at all.

For example, let us take the case of Kunta Kinte. If Kunta Kinte, Alex Haley's ancestor in *Roots*, had not been brutally kidnapped and sold as a slave, there is no likelihood that the author of *Roots* would have come to exist in the 20th century. The mating and reproduction of each generation, in turn, depends on a host of contingencies. If the chain were to have been broken at any point, by a parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, etc., we would get a different result in this generation. If it were not for the initial injustice, Kunta Kinte's descendants might well have been native Africans, perhaps residents today of Juffure (Kunta Kinte's village in West Africa).

Hence, we cannot employ the straightforward notion of compensation (returning people to the level they would have reached had the injustice not occurred) when the injustice spans several generations. Perhaps some compelling version of the argument might be created which confronts this difficulty. Rather than deny this possibility I wish merely to claim that such an argument, if it were developed, should, at the least, accept my objection to mistargeting.

Compensation is not compatible with the mistargeting which results from preferential treatment applied merely to racial categories in competitive meritocratic contexts. Compensation cannot plausibly mean benefiting some blacks (already well-off) for earlier injustices to *other* blacks —particularly when those who do *not*, by and large, benefit from the compensatory argument (the urban underclass) are experiencing extremely disadvantaged conditions. To take a provocative analogy, would it not have been outrageous if the German government had paid "compensation" to well-off American Jews after World War II, ignoring the orphans and other direct victims of the Holocaust? It would not have been real compensation to benefit Jews indiscriminately or, even worse, to benefit disproportionately those who were untouched by the injustices at issue. For this reason, I conclude that the compensation argument does not alter the general conclusion about preferential treatment reached earlier. When it is directed at those who are, themselves, from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is admissible within our framework (for then the gain in equal life chances may balance the loss in strictly meritocratic assignment). But when, in competitive meritocratic contexts, it is applied merely on the basis of arbitrary native characteristics, then we have grounds for objecting to it.

Once we take account of the family, equal opportunity demonstrates the plausibility of a *limited liberalism*—one which offers ideals without an ideal, one which offers principles in conflict without a single unified vision. However, these moral conflicts do not disenfranchise us from offering significant prescriptions. If we simply embrace substantial gains without a loss and reject substantial losses without a gain, we can already see important results for the contemporary scene. While these results do not add up to a systematic theory, they should assist us in rethinking important policies. cc

Suggested Reading:

Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

James S. Fishkin, *Justice, Equal Opportunity and the Family* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983).

John Rawls, A *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality" in Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman (eds.) *Philosophy, Politics and Society, Second Series* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962).

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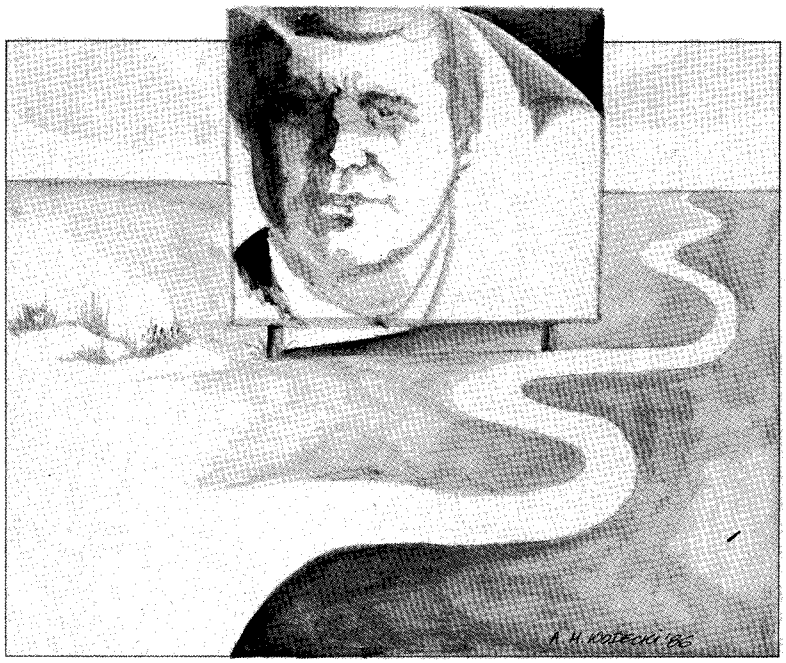
JOHN F. KENNEDY: CHARACTER AND CAMELOT *by Thomas C. Reeves*



John F. Kennedy first gained national attention at the age of 23. His book *Why England Slept*, published in 1940, became a best-seller and earned the new Harvard graduate plaudits as a man of learning and thoughtfulness. Kennedy was heard from again in the summer of 1944 when the *New York Times* carried a front-page story describing his dramatic rescue of 10 men following the destruction of PT-109 by a Japanese destroyer in the South Pacific. Kennedy's friend John Hersey soon published a story about the incident in *The New Yorker* which was republished in condensed form in the *Reader's Digest*. Jack Kennedy was instantly a national hero.

In June 1946, *Look* magazine published a lengthy eulogy of Kennedy in which the young congressional candidate was said to have brains, charm, and courage. After winning the primary in the solidly Democratic Eleventh District of Massachusetts, JFK was applauded by *Time* magazine for his determination, selflessness, and integrity. Other publications echoed the theme: John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a man of extraordinary character and intelligence.

Kennedy's three terms in the House added little to his reputation. He was not a legislative leader, and his name rarely appeared in major newspapers and magazines. On the whole, Jack's voting record reflected the views of his multimillionaire father, former Ambassador to England, Joseph P. Kennedy. A staunch anticommunist, the young congressman was thoroughly committed to private enterprise and suspicious of Big Government. On the other hand, he favored welfare proposals beneficial to his many blue collar constituents and befriended legislation liberalizing immigration laws, promoting civil rights, and defending organized labor.

Soon after Kennedy entered the Senate in 1952 it was widely apparent that he had aspirations for even higher office. His marriage to the beautiful and aristocratic Jacqueline Bouvier in September 1953 received lavish attention in the press and clearly enhanced the senator's political opportunities. Kennedy also seemed to be more mature, more active, and somewhat more liberal. He published numerous articles in major magazines, lectured widely, and gained national notoriety for his efforts on behalf of the St. Lawrence Seaway. He advocated boosts in defense spending and expressed apprehensions about Indochina. He also drew the wrath of many liberals for cosponsoring the Communist Control Act of 1954 and for failing to vote from his hospital bed later that year on the Senate censure of Joe McCarthy, a personal and family friend.

In early 1956 Kennedy published *Profiles in Courage*, a highly acclaimed study of "grace under pressure" in American politics. The book, awarded the Pulitzer Prize, brimmed over with moral exhortation; historical figures were praised for their high ideals, absolute principles, bravery, and sound thinking. It was clear that the author identified himself with these virtues. It was obvious too that the book was designed, at least in part, to bolster Kennedy's political fortunes. "Today the challenge of political courage looms larger than ever before. . . . We shall need compromises in the days ahead, to be sure. But these will be, or should be, compromises of issues, not of principles."

Later that year Kennedy made a serious bid for the Democratic Vice Presidential nomination. His youth, his lack of solid legislative achievement, his father's shady reputation, and his Roman Catholicism proved too much of a handicap and resulted in a second ballot defeat. Few doubted, however, that JFK would try again, perhaps next time for the White House.

The quest for the Presidency began almost immediately. Kennedy wooed East Coast liberals, spoke out boldly on foreign affairs, attracted Southerners with a vote against civil rights, and boosted his legislative record by serving on the McClellan Committee as it probed labor unions. He was soon to give speeches in every state of the Union, including Alaska and Hawaii, and in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Photographs and stories about Jack and Jackie appeared in scores of newspapers and magazines. A typical feature article in the *Saturday Evening Post* declared, "Mr. Kennedy is the clean-cut, smiling American boy, trustworthy, loyal, brave, clean and reverent, boldly facing up to the challenges of the Atomic Age."

After his smashing reelection victory in 1958, Kennedy made overtures to the leading liberal intellectuals who supported Adlai Stevenson for the Presidency. He created a "brains trust" that included, among others, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul Samuelson, and Walt Rostow. He spoke out for civil liberties, civil rights, the elderly, and liberal welfare legislation. He published two books along with scores of articles and book reviews on

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a wide variety of topics.

James MacGregor Burns, professor of political science at Williams College and an award-winning biographer of Franklin D. Roosevelt, published *John Kennedy: A Political Profile*. Burns portrayed the 42-year-old senator as deeper, more reflective, more responsible than the public, basking in the candidate's good looks and eloquence, even imagined. He was "a serious driven man," addicted to hard thought and action, cool and self-possessed, brave, a man of great moral strength who could give the nation the leadership it craved. "Such leadership calls for magical qualities of heart and spirit, of joy and earnestness, indeed of rhetoric and passion, that are bequeathed to few men."

Once Kennedy had secured the Democratic nomination, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the Pulitzer Prize winning historian from Harvard University, published a frankly partisan campaign polemic entitled *Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?* Schlesinger charged that the Vice President lacked a "steady deposit of conviction," an "instinct for dignity," a political philosophy, and a sense of history. Kennedy, on the other hand, was a man of principle, consistency, and self-confidence. He was "an exceptionally cerebral figure," "a committed liberal" who admired intellectuals and would turn to them for advice. Nixon was in the Presidential race for private gratification, the author charged. "But Kennedy is ambitious because the Presidency alone would give him the power to fulfill purposes which have long lain in his mind and heart."

As the Kennedy Administration got underway, a stream of articles and books celebrated the character, intellect, and political skill of the new President. Theodore H. White's highly influential *The Making of the President 1960* praised Kennedy for his high-minded ambition, energy, and intelligence. Washington journalist Robert J. Donovan lionized the President, a long-time friend, in *PT-109: John F. Kennedy in World War II*, a book excerpted in the *Saturday Evening Post* and made into a movie. Richard Tregaskis, a Kennedy classmate at Harvard, published *John F. Kennedy: War Hero*.

Reporters in the major media, who had overwhelmingly favored Kennedy during the election, lavished attention upon the handsome young couple in the White House, noting especially their attention to style, culture, and learning. Many stories focused on the Kennedy family's happy domestic life. While the President's political policies often drew sharp rebukes in the press, few leading writers chose to attack Kennedy personally. In an article tantalizingly entitled "What you don't know about Kennedy," *Look* magazine reporter Fletcher Knebel revealed nothing bolder than the fact that "Kennedy uses profanity with the unconcern of a sailor, which he was and is."

Not everyone, of course, embraced Kennedy. Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman, for example, had long suspected that he lacked convictions and was little more than an extension of his father's ego. Voices on the far left and right were often extremely critical, and conservatives increased the tempo as the second Presidential campaign began.

In September 1963 conservative journalist Victor Lasky published what *Newsweek* called "the first thoroughly and unmercifully anti-Kennedy book," *J.F.K.: The Man and the Myth*. Several former charges were reexamined, including a "first marriage" in 1947, poor helmsmanship aboard PT-109, softness toward Joe McCarthy and his "ism," and vote-buying in the 1960 West Virginia primary. Lasky dissected JFK's voting record in Congress as "one of carefully contrived contradictions." But Lasky's central thrust was aimed directly at Kennedy's personal character. However charming, sincere, and brilliant JFK appeared to be in public, he was in fact, according to Lasky, cold, calculating, vain, superficial, and morally obtuse. Kennedy's assassination three months later made Lasky's charges almost unpatriotic, and the book was withdrawn from print.

On the heels of the tragedy in Dallas, a literature of adulation burst into print, the likes of which the nation had not experienced since the death of Lincoln. This was understandable, of course, given the President's youth and physical attractiveness. Soon JFK became a legendary figure who presided over Camelot, a Presidential Administration of unmatched wisdom, virtue, and style.

In 1965 Kennedy's personal secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, published *My Twelve Years with John F. Kennedy*. The book was romantic, worshipful, and dedicated "with love" to Kennedy's children. Of far more substance were large volumes published that same year by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who had been a Special Assistant to the President, and Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy's speech writer and chief adviser since January 1953. Schlesinger's book, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, cast Camelot in concrete. For more than a thousand pages, in learned, moving, and often brilliant prose, Schlesinger lauded Kennedy's intelligence, moral courage, self-awareness, learning, style, empathy, vitality, humor, detachment, discipline, and compassion. The author used the word *character* several times, defining it once as "that combination of toughness of fiber and courage." Indeed, for Schlesinger, the President and his entire family were virtually beyond reproach; the Administration, so abruptly and cruelly ended, was one of history's brightest moments.

Sorensen admitted that his view of the late President was "unobjective," and his lengthy and eloquent *Kennedy* matched Schlesinger's volume in total devotion. JFK was "the brightest light of our time," "almost a legendary figure," a man whose "cool, analytical mind was stimulated by a warm, compassionate heart." Kind friend, devoted husband and father, churchman, wit, war hero, author, idealist, statesman—Kennedy was all of this and more. Sorensen was convinced that historians would rank his former employer among the greatest Chief Executives.

In 1972 political scientist James David Barber published his much-heralded *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. At the center of all history, Barber argued, is the person; to understand the past, therefore, and make meaningful predictions about the future, one must understand people—not just on the surface, but on the deepest possible level. Barber was convinced that it was especially important to understand the character of American Presidents, those extremely powerful and influential men entrusted by the public with moral and political leadership. Barber based his treatment of Kennedy on the devotional volumes then available. JFK emerged, as Sorensen had predicted, among the very best Chief

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Executives.

But cracks in the Kennedy image (beyond Lasky) began to appear as early as 1964. Richard J. Whalen's carefully researched biography of Joseph P. Kennedy revealed an unscrupulous manipulator, shamelessly willing to plot and spend in order to propel a son into the White House. All of the Kennedys, including JFK, were seen to be wholly under the influence of the Founding Father.

Liberal journalist Benjamin C. Bradlee, another Kennedy insider and admirer, further undermined the credibility of the Schlesinger and Sorensen portraits of JFK with his *Conversations With Kennedy*, published in 1975. Bradlee depicted a man who was exceedingly vain (he hired a woman just to brush his hair), incredibly foul-mouthed, petty, penurious, insensitive, spiteful, eager for salacious gossip, and extremely manipulative. He slipped secret government documents to journalists in return for favors, got drunk, spoke in favor of abortion, denigrated liberals, and (along with Jackie) showed a penchant for rock 'n' roll. Even the alleged brilliance was missing; the President took "the better part of an hour" with a foreign service officer and his son learning how to master "Ich bin ein Berliner." Bradlee also included several somewhat veiled references to a Kennedy interest in women other than his wife.

That same year, a leak from a Senate Intelligence Committee staff member led to the revelation that a beautiful California woman, Judith Campbell Exner, had been secretly admitted to the White House on many occasions over an almost two-year period to carry on a romance with the President. Exner was also having affairs with Sam Giancana and John Roselli, Mafia figures involved in a newly disclosed CIA plot to poison Fidel Castro. It was learned that when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who was aware of the plot, learned of the Kennedy-Exner trysts, he confronted the President directly, and the clandestine visits stopped. (Giancana was murdered just before he was to testify before the Senate committee. Roselli was murdered afterward.)

Exner reluctantly admitted the facts of her affair with Kennedy, noting that Evelyn Lincoln had arranged her visits to the White House with the assistance of Dave Powers. Her later book, *My Story*, written after the FBI attempted to drive her to suicide, was filled with compelling evidence. Her frank, detailed, and generally sympathetic descriptions of Frank Sinatra (who had introduced her to Kennedy and Giancana), the "Rat Pack," her Mafia lovers, White House staff members, and the President himself —attentive, aggressive, strongly contemplating divorce —caused a storm in the press. Evidence uncovered by the *New York Times* that JFK was almost certainly aware of the plot to kill Castro raised even more questions about Camelot.

Before 1975 was over *New York Times* columnist William Safire obtained FBI documents through the Freedom of Information Act showing that Joseph P. Kennedy had quietly paid a former JFK girlfriend $500,000 to drop a lawsuit against the President-elect. In San Francisco, socialite Joan Lundberg Hitchcock gave reporters details of her three-year affair with JFK during the late 1950's. *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines ran lengthy and obviously well-researched articles linking Kennedy romantically with several well-known actresses, scores of unknown young women, and two staff members code-named "Fiddle" and "Faddle" by the Secret Service. One former New Frontiersman was quoted as saying of the Kennedy White House, "It was a revolving door over there. A woman had to fight to get in that line."

It was becoming apparent that the stories of the President's extramarital exploits were not only true but had long been widely known. Lewis H. Lapham reported:

> In New York during the thousand days, it was impossible to go to dinner among the forward elements of society (i.e., with journalists passing through town on their way from Washington to Hyannisport, with White House advisers and Broadway directors, et cetera) without listening to someone tell yet another amusing story about yet another actress who had discovered (much to her wonder and surprise) that politics wasn't always as boring as deficit spending or Berlin.

For all of the rhetoric about the high-mindedness of the Kennedy Administration, there had been a taboo, especially in liberal circles, about publicly discussing the President's personal character. Only occasionally was the silence broken by insiders. In 1977 former French Ambassador Hervé Alphand published a revealing recollection of JFK in August 1962: "He likes pleasure and women. His desires are difficult to satisfy without fear of a scandal which would be utilized by his political adversaries. That will happen one day, for he does not take sufficient precautions in this Puritan country."

Objective scholarship entered the picture in 1976 with *The Search for J.F.K.* by Joan and Clay Blair Jr. This superb study was based upon thousands of recently opened documents from the Kennedy Library and more than 150 oral interviews. The authors focused their attention upon the years 1935 to 1947, but the impact of their research shed light upon the entire history of the Kennedys. For the first time the public could grasp the dimensions of the gap between what was passing for Kennedy history and the truth.

JFK was revealed as an extraordinarily sickly and frail young man, born with an unstable back. (The Blairs disclosed a Kennedy family cover-up about JFK's health, from his early childhood through the onset of Addison's disease in 1947, a cover-up perpetuated by Burns, Schlesinger, Sorensen, and the press.) His alleged education at the London School of Economics and Stanford University amounted to nothing. His first book, *Why England Slept*, was strongly influenced by his father and was in large part a product of journalist Arthur Krock. "He was certainly very bright, but he was a 'quick study,' not an intellectual or scholar." JFK's almost mechanical pursuit of women, from age 17 on, was documented fully. "He relished the chase, the conquest, the testing of himself, the challenge of numbers and quality."

The Blairs completely revised JFK's naval history, showing with meticulous clarity that the stories of the PT-109 accident and rescue had been grossly misrepresented. "He was, in effect, a 'manufactured' war hero." Kennedy's political ambitions and thoughts after the war were largely

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dictated by his father.

In 1980, historian Herbert S. Parmet published *Jack: The Struggles of John F. Kennedy*. A sympathetic study, it was nevertheless the most reliable biography to date, making use of recent scholarship and adding valuable information and analysis. The author was especially strong on Kennedy's early education (revealing his I.Q. to be 119), his religious skepticism, his heavy reliance upon his father in all of his political campaigns, his marital difficulties ("Politics and promiscuity were all part of being married to John Kennedy"), and his studied evasion of the Joe McCarthy censure. Parmet's account of Theodore Sorensen's dominant role in the creation of *Profiles of Courage*, and of his authorship of many other "Kennedy" publications, raised new questions about JFK's character. (Kennedy claimed sole authorship of the book even more vigorously than he denied being a victim of Addison's disease.) His examination of the Pulitzer Prize award suggested the presence of Joseph P. Kennedy.

The Kennedys: Dynasty and Disaster, 1848-1983 by John H. Davis, was especially important because of its piercing and unsentimental appraisal of Jackie Kennedy, a Davis relative. The book caused a stir because of its revelations that Judith Campbell Exner had told the President about her affair with Sam Giancana and that Kennedy was jealous. Davis speculated that JFK was using Exner to monitor the CIA's "dirty business" against Castro. This was "reckless in the extreme," Davis concluded. "But as we know, John Kennedy thrived on danger, risk, and intrigue." Davis blamed "sycophantic journalists" for the discrepancy between the Kennedy image and reality.

Despite the sycophants and the Kennedy family's careful control of documents in the Kennedy Library, we know a great deal about the man who served as the 35th President. What we need now, in my judgment, is a skilled and objective examination of the Kennedy Administration to see how much of what JFK really was made any difference to the nation and the world. The effort, inspired by Barber and begun by Parmet, needs completion.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who, like Theodore Sorensen, clings stubbornly to the Kennedy portrait he helped create, recently sneered at what he called "the *National Enquirer* school of biographers" who arrive at "highly speculative character analysis." He contended that "if anything untoward happened at all" in the Kennedy White House "it did not interfere with Kennedy's conduct of the Presidency." That provocative assertion demands scrutiny, because it opens up the entire issue of Presidential character.

Obviously, many decent men would make poor Presidents, but the office nevertheless requires character. The visibility of the Presidency and its power for good and evil are unequaled. If a Chief Executive has, say, an emotional weakness and needs to prove his masculinity, the results could be catastrophic. Should a President be self-destructive, reckless, ruthless, corrupt, or completely cynical, millions—even billions—might suffer.

It can be argued that John F. Kennedy was the most immoral man ever to serve as President; he was certainly the most lascivious. Almost all of the triumphs recorded in his campaign literature have been debunked. We know about a number of his lies and cover-ups, his largely ghost-written eloquence, his almost wholly hedonistic and pragmatic approach towards ethics and morality, his compulsive satyriasis. George Smathers, a close friend of Kennedy, was recently quoted as saying, "No one was off limits to Jack—not your wife, your mother, your sister. If he wanted a woman, he'd take her."

And yet Kennedy continues to be ranked among our most popular Presidents, even by historians. The volume quoting Smathers is entitled *A Hero for Our Time: An Intimate Story of the Kennedy Years*. Is this because of JFK's good looks, wit, and style, still seen in the media, or does it merely reflect a longing for happier times? Does the tragedy of the assassination still work in Kennedy's favor? Surely the liberal bent of the intellectual world plays a role.

It is clear that Kennedy continues to require scholarly scrutiny. Millions of documents have yet to be released; we need to think through the abundance of material now available. When the relationship between the President's character and Administration policy becomes clearer we may not only have a better view of the Thousand Days but a deeper understanding of the Presidency. cc

Rock 'N' Roll Never Forgets

(continued from page 9)

gamble made by a people who were longing for heroic challenges. Political idealism is often dangerous, but it is nothing in comparison to the desire to be idealistic. All through the 50's we had told ourselves in school, in church, and in the newspapers, that the United States was not just a country: it was a commitment to the high ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality. And so in our dissatisfaction with the way we were, we spun the wheel and put almost 200 million people down on the red. *Rien ne va plus.*

In 1960, the first of the baby boomers were in high school. When Kennedy was shot, they were already in college. Whether his assassination made a difference it was hard to say. By 1963, many Americans had had enough of the phrase-maker with the boyish shock of hair. I remember, the day after, hearing one student tell another, "Too bad they didn't get Johnson." In any event, we were unable to endure very long the hollow idealism of the Peace Corps. If the kids really wanted to make the world a better place, as parents and teachers had told them, repeatedly, was their duty, then they would have to do it without the help of an older generation that was willing to sell out its ideals.

Recent studies indicate that the most radical students on campus were not rebelling against conservative parents. On the contrary, their parents tended to be very liberal. The history of SDS is instructive. Originally an offshoot of a cold war liberal organization presided over by *éminences grises* of the anti-Stalinist left, SDS students grew tired of all the Fabian shilly-shallying. If the U.S. was really as corrupt and decadent as their masters said it was, and if the democratic process was still only a *trompe l'oeil* set up by capitalists, why *not* tear it down? In a revolution, what makes socialists preferable to Trotskyists or Trotskyists preferable to Stalinists? Like most popular front groups, SDS

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was quickly taken over by the most radical elements.

By the mid-60's, it was clear that what might have started as high-spirited populist reaction on campus had turned into a small-scale civil war between the generations. Demography only partly explains what happened. The baby boomers, it is true, were and are a disproportionate share of the population and would have exerted strong pressures on any society. But if the 50's restoration had been sound to begin with, the center would have held. What went wrong?

If we had the answers, we could avoid repeating the mistakes of the Eisenhower years. One mistake was the attempt to create an unrealistic set of ideals that did not match the American experience. All the cold war rant about democracy turned out to mean very little, when the Hungarians took us at our word. All those promises to help the oppressed peoples behind the Iron Curtain might have made us feel good at the time, but the hangover had a bitter taste. For all the talk about moral values, the 50's was an age of moralism, not morality. So long as a man was successful, we really didn't care what he was like. That Ike had almost left his wife for a younger woman, that Las Vegas was being taken over by organized crime, that most Hollywood stars went through half a dozen marriages didn't seem to bother either the press or the people.

All the talk about moral degeneracy these days is, at best, disingenuous. Of course, we have learned to tolerate the idea of popular actresses living in sin and bearing illegitimate children, but how much better would they be for going through the motions of a civil marriage every time they got the itch? Who does more to degrade our moral sense, Jessica Lange or Elizabeth Taylor? So long as we teach our children to idolize "show people," they will grow up worshiping wealth, power, and sex appeal. Hypocrisy may be a necessary evil in any society, but in the 1950's we turned it into a first principle. Vice was tolerable, so long as it was "not in front of the children." Unfortunately, the children caught on all too quickly, and the results were the fulfillment of the most terrifying predictions about the last days, when "the children shall rise up against their parents."

Fifteen years later, we still don't know who won. In the new orthodoxy of Jerry Rubin, Bob Greene, and *Esquire*, we can have it all: 50's affluence and 60's fun. We even profess a sentimental commitment to the family, so long as it does not interfere with our getting and spending. Our children might have to grow up, like Harlow's famous rhesus monkeys, with wire mother surrogates named Apple II and Space Invaders. But at the slow rate we're having children, the baby boomers will continue to dominate the scene, age by age, until the end of the century. One thing I can safely predict: most of us will never grow up. At the age of 40 some are still, like a physician acquaintance of mine, "tuning in" to old Hendrix albums and "dropping out" by mid-afternoon. Others, like a stockbroker friend, are having champagne lunches in restaurants made out of exotic plants and antique packing crates. They're "forty years old and going on twenty," as Jerry Lee Lewis sings, and he ought to know.

We are still counting the casualties of the 1960's—but who ever *won* a civil war? One thing is clear: the wounds will not be completely healed until the last of the baby boomers is laid to rest in an organic landfill site with nothing but a Bob Dylan album and a thick securities portfolio to leave his only child of a third marriage. Meantime, Mr. Mellencamp is making an effort to come to grips with the real America. It is not an America you can discover in the pages of *Forbes* or *Rolling Stone*. It isn't something concocted by Walt Disney or the editors of *Life*, but a small town back home in Indiana. Welcome back, John.

—Thomas Fleming

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles*:

Sexual Politicking

"Like their spiritual ancestresses—the Susan B. Anthonys, Carrie Nations, and Mrs. Grundys—feminists cannot abide the old Adam. They are desperate to trade in the beer-swilling, cigar-smoking, street-brawling lout so imperfectly designed by the Creator for a new model, someone with Alan Alda's assertiveness, Tom Brokaw's brains, and David Bowie's masculinity."

—from "Old Adam, New Eve"
by Thomas Fleming

ALSO

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The Chapel and the Voting Booth *by Richard John Neuhaus*

"I do not yet see the absolute necessity of extirpating the Christian religion from among us."
—Jonathan Swift

***Religion in American Public Life* by A. James Reichley, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.**

I am sure it is possible to praise too highly James Reichley's *Religion in American Public Life*, but it would take some doing. Reichley, a Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution, has produced a superb historical and analytical survey of religion's role in American public life. His book should be added to the list of required readings in the continuing, and growing, debates about religion in the politics of a democratic society. And if that sounds like a blurb for the publisher's promotion efforts, so be it.

Among the merits of Reichley's work is that it is an effective answer to those who ask, whether in complaint or in approval, "How come religion is getting so mixed up in politics nowadays?" The answer is that "nowadays" goes back about 300 years in the venture that is America. Reichley is especially strong in his treatment of the intentions of the founders and what should be made of the "no establishment" and "free exercise" clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Demonstrating a broad and sure grasp of the pertinent literature, Reichley shows that the courts' treatment of religion, particularly in this century, is a dramatic departure from what the founders had in mind.

One senses that he is not entirely comfortable with all the arguments made by the "strict constructionist" and "noninterpretivist" schools of jurisprudence, but he does follow the solid intuition that court rulings should at least be in respectful conversation with what the Constitution actually says. What the Constitution actually says, as also illuminated by the debates surrounding the adoption of the First Amendment, cannot be squared with an understanding of the "no establishment" clause that confines religion to a purely private sphere, safely segregated from the political arena. He does not put it quite so sharply, but the point is clear: the founding intention was that "no establishment" should be in the service of "free exercise" both private and public.

But the list of merits goes on. He offers a necessary corrective of some fundamentalists today who are engaged in a historical revisionism that would turn the founders into a band of born-again Bible-believing evangelical Christians. But he offers an even more necessary corrective of academically conventional wisdoms which portray the founders as thoroughly secular and "enlightened" men who viewed religion as a residual superstition of temporary usefulness in courting the sentiments of a benighted populace. Washington, Madison, Adams, and even Jefferson (maybe especially Jefferson), he believes, should be taken seriously in what they say about the connection between religion and republican virtue. The burden of proof, says Reichley, rests upon those who dismiss the founders' religious affirma-

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tions as politically cynical puffery. In addition, he suggests, it is only the prejudices of secularism that can explain the cavalier dismissal of religion in the thinking of John Locke, upon whom some of the founders drew so heavily. Reichley acknowledges that not all the founders would pass recognized tests of Christian orthodoxy, but some of them would, and almost all of them were quite explicit in their commitment to transcendent beliefs which are unmistakably biblical in source and form.

The book begins and ends with a very typical affirmation, in this case by Washington: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens." After a historical survey of the ways in which this insight has worked and has been frustrated in American life, Reichley concludes with a chapter titled "Religion and Democracy." He writes, "The question therefore must be faced: can democracy flourish without support from religious values?" In answering that question he notes that there are indeed secular alternatives to religion. The alternative secular values, he believes, must be based on either self-interest or some kind of social interest, and of these value systems he suggests there are basically three kinds: egoism (based entirely on self-interest), authoritarianism (based entirely on social authority), and civil humanism (based on a mix of concern for self-interest and for the public good).

Since authoritarianism is by definition nondemocratic, it can be speedily dispatched. Egoism on both the left (Herbert Marcuse) and the right (Milton Friedman) is very much alive and kicking in American culture. Egoism includes both left and right versions of libertarianism, plus the utopianisms of sundry "human potential" and "liberation" movements. (Reichley notes that, come to the crunch, even Milton Friedman abandons the dogmas of egoism and acknowledges the need for altruistic behavior in society). As strong as the egoistic impulses are, however, civil humanism is the most respectable and common secular alternative to religion.

Civil humanism takes several theoretical shapes, from Aristotle to John Rawls, but none of them "meet the test of intellectual credibility." Students of the classical tradition will likely object that Reichley does not do justice to Aristotle, but then neither do most of the secularists who claim his mantle today. When Reichley says these secular theories do not meet the test of intellectual credibility, he means that those who claim that all values come from the self (Hobbes) or from the social whole (Marx) are simply flying in the face of psychological and historical evidence. If one did not learn it from Jeremiah or Saint Paul, Freud has instructed us on the darker sides of the self. And, as to theories about the social whole, after the Holocaust, the Gulag Archipelago, and their myriad imitations, only the purblind entertain illusions about the righteousness of the collective.

Reichley concludes that the constitutive ideas of democratic governance, having to do with rights and duties, can only be supported by appeal to transcendent truth. He believes that "the founding fathers after all were right: republican government depends for its health on values that over the not-so-long run must come from religion." Not just any religion will do, however. Aware that some forms of religion make democracy impossible and life itself intolerable, Reichley rejects the "idealistic" religion that leads to collective crusades which trample upon individual rights and "personalist" religion which exalts the individual above the bonds of civility and positive law. The terms "idealistic" and "personalist" are not the happiest choice, since these terms have been so variously employed in the history of ideas, but Reichley's point is clear. The theory that he embraces he calls "theist-humanism," which is perhaps a bit clumsy, but indicates a commitment to the ordering of human life in accountability to transcendent truth.

There is a certain messiness in Reichley's idea of democratic society, but it is a necessary messiness. The messiness has everything to do with the First Amendment. Those who want a more coherent social theory and system, those who want to "get it all together," find it intolerable that religion, which is essential to the democratic order, should be permitted to go its own way beyond the reach of governmental control. "Democratic government, therefore, finds itself bound by the uncomfortable but necessary condition that, while depending on religion for much of its moral sustenance, it must leave the churches and other religious institutions almost entirely free to develop and promote whatever values or beliefs their spiritual insights may inspire."

Rousseau and a host of others who recognized the social need for religion proposed that religion is too important to be left to believers and should be brought under state control. Rousseau was only more consistent than some others in setting forth an elaborate "civil religion" which should replace inconvenient particularisms such as Christianity. The American idea that there should be no established religion was truly revolutionary. It must also be admitted, however, that that idea was grievously compromised in the middle of the 19th century when, in the face of "the immigrant hordes," the common school movement produced a governmentally established religion in the guise of education. But that is a subject that Reichley does not address.

And now I may have given the impression that *Religion in American Public Life* is chiefly a book of social theory. That would be a mistake, for it is chiefly a book of history, telling the story of how in fact religion has impinged and continues to impinge upon the public arena. Abolition, Prohibition, the Social Gospel, the rise of the Religious Right, the twists and turns of Catholic and Jewish leaderships—the story is told authoritatively and in brief compass. In a nonpolemical manner, Reichley puts his sharpest challenges to the leaders of main-line liberal Protestantism. He argues that in recent decades they have manifestly failed to understand both the imperatives and limits of religion's role in democratic society. Correctives have been attempted, but they have gone largely unheeded by main-line leadership. He notes that the 1975 Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation was "the first major attempt to act against destructive aspects of modernity without rejecting pluralism or social responsi-

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bility," but the liberal main line, for the most part, chose to interpret Hartford as an assault upon the interests of institutionalized liberalism. Similarly, he notes that efforts such as the Institute on Religion and Democracy, which seek to nurture the connections between faith and free society, have been uncritically assailed by an increasingly defensive and indeed beleaguered main-line Protestantism.

Religion in American Public Life is not an optimistic book. It is clear-headed and sobering. It might have been, it should have been, considerably more sobering. It would have been an even stronger book had Reichley taken into account Nietzsche's more relentless critique. That critique suggests that it is not only democratic society but civilization itself that becomes impossible when the elites of a culture agree on the abandonment of transcendent truth. And Reichley might have developed more fully the irony that religion that is primarily concerned about civilization or democracy is of little use to either. As one of its authors, I believe that was the deeper argument in the Hartford Appeal. And, of course, Reichley might have and maybe should have done a lot of other things. But what he has done in this book is so very good that I will not dwell on its omissions. Nor will I—although, as mentioned at the outset, it is undoubtedly possible—praise the book too highly. To say that it is a superb treatment of an increasingly important subject is, it seems to me, to say it just right. cc

REVISIONS

Bookman of the Right

Publishing serious conservative books is no way to get rich and famous in modern America. Just ask Henry Regnery. In 1947 Regnery founded a tiny new publishing company over a drugstore in Hinsdale, Illinois, hoping "to challenge the governmental and intellectual establishment." At the outset his father warned him: "If you ever begin to make any money in that business . . . you can be pretty sure that you are publishing the wrong kind of books." Sure enough, over the next 25 years the Henry Regnery Company struggled to stay in the black. Yet, improbably, the fledgling firm did manage to rattle the powers that be, forcing upon Ivory Tower professors, *New York Times* reviewers, and leading politicians issues they preferred to ignore. As much as anyone, Mr. Regnery helped to launch a new conservative movement in America.

With the clarity and grace of a man at home with serious literature, Henry Regnery recounts the remarkable story of his life with books in *Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher* (Regnery; Chicago). It is the story of an eager student of mathematics and physics at MIT who served as a zealous New Deal administrator and eventually became an articulate critic of technocratic scientism and arrogant social planning. Henry Regnery grew from the boy who spent his newsstand earnings to buy the works of Tom Paine into the man who mortgaged a secure future in textiles for the chance to publish books like *God and Man at Yale* by an unknown undergraduate (William F. Buckley) and *The Conservative Mind* by an obscure history teacher (Russell Kirk). If ever there were a refutation of the stereotype of the conservative as a hidebound and calculating personality, it is Henry Regnery, whose intellectual evolution testifies to a rare openness and flexibility of mind and whose publishing record is one long list of daring gambles thought too risky by staid East Coast publishers.

After two years of study in Germany in the 1930's, Regnery began his career as a book publisher shortly after World War II, with controversial works by Victor Gollancz, Hans Rothfels, and Freda Utley opposing the vindictive Morgenthau Plan imposed upon Germany by the Allies and exposing its disastrous human consequences. In the years that followed, Regnery kept the political fires burning with revisionist histories of World War II, with exposés of corruption in the Truman Administration, and with attacks upon Zionism and the United Nations. After helping the postwar conservative movement find its feet, Regnery allowed William Buckley, Brent Bozell, Jameson Campaigne, Frank Meyer, and others to thrash out the conservative political and economic agenda on his presses.

Regnery deserves praise for his contribution to a healthy political ferment. He deserves even more praise for refusing to dedicate his life to political passions—a fate that has befallen more than one conservative. One of Regnery's first books was a philosophical examination of the medieval conception of space and spirit by Edmund Whittaker. Later came important religious works by Louis Bouyer, Paul Claudel, and Romano Guardini and works of philosophy by Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, and Karl Jaspers. Regnery's contribution to literature included important books by Roy Campbell, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound, published at a time when the right-wing politics of these writers scared off many other publishers. Regnery also brought out a landmark study by Russell Kirk on the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Eliot took a personal interest in the Chicago-based publisher and advised him on a number of his undertakings.

If there can be any irony in such a life or such a book, it may lie in the preface by Ronald Reagan, a man once thought unelectable. But in the middle of the conservative triumph, it is not at all clear that it is the high moral purpose of Gabriel Marcel and T.S. Eliot which reigns triumphant. Sometimes it almost seems as if Irving Babbitt is being replaced by George (no relation) in the conservative pantheon. If that does not happen, part of the credit will be due to the efforts of a dissident publisher. (BC) cc

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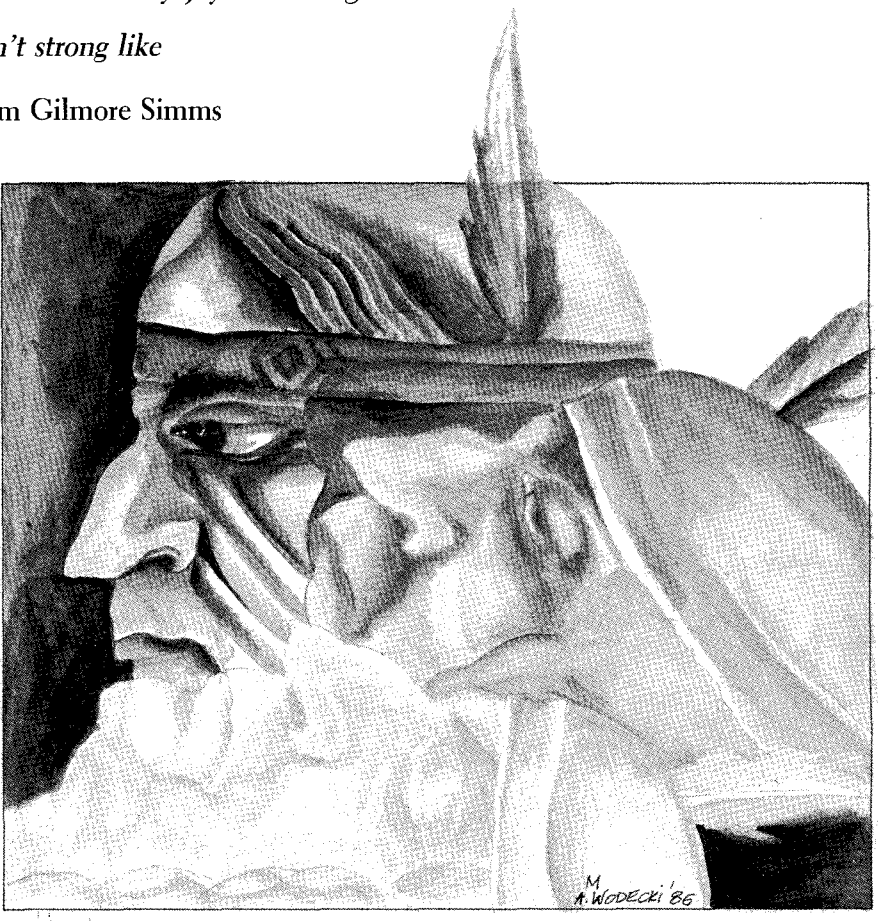
The Rights of Tradition *by Jay Mechling*

"Ah, kurnel, you see, Injun man ain't strong like white man!"

—William Gilmore Simms

A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community by Anastasia M. Shkilnyk, New Haven: Yale University Press.

The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945 A Photographic History of Cultural Survival by William E. Farr, Seattle: University of Washington Press.



We are approaching an important centenary, though there probably will be little public notice amid the hoopla over the bicentennial of the Constitution. In 1888 Franz Boas joined the newly formed faculty at Clark University to become the first professor of anthropology in the United States, and in that same year he and a handful of others founded the American Folklore Society. The list of important anthropologists trained by Boas reads like a "who's who" of American anthropology: Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Edward Sapir, Melville Herskovits, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead. So it makes great sense to mark 1888 as the founding date of anthropology and folklore studies as academic disciplines in the United States.

That first generation of Boasian anthropologists and folklorists saw as their duty a sort of "salvage operation" consisting of the collecting, recording, and preserving (where possible) of the cultures of native American people. Since it was clear by 1888 that modernization was an irresistible force in the evolution of society, these anthropologists and folklorists rushed into the field to preserve what they could of the premodern cultures close at hand, much as a biologist might rush in to save a remaining few members of an endangered species. The turn of the century saw the creation of the great collections of American Indian artifacts in museums, the publication of hundreds of monographs on American Indian beliefs and customs, and even the use of "Indian Lore" as a pedagogical tool in the programs of youth organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Campfire Girls. Still, it is one thing to save the American bison, and quite another to "save" the American Indian.

Two recent books remind us how much those disciplines have changed. William Farr's depiction of the Blackfeet belongs in the earlier period, admittedly a "salvage operation" aimed at preserving the photographic record of the reservation experience from 1882 to the end of World War II. Farr assumes that the culture of the Blackfeet of the 1880's is gone, that what we have to learn from these photographs is something of a lost world. Anastasia Shkilnyk's study of an Ojibwa community, on the other hand, shares with a few others a radically new goal for the study of native Americans. We ought to understand the story of the destruction of a Canadian Ojibwa community, says the author, not for what it teaches us about the past or even about the Ojibwa, but for what it teaches us about *our* future.

This announced goal raises somewhat dramatically the stakes of Shkilnyk's inquiry and permits us to read her book not as a narrow study of a tiny community, but as a critical test case of the collision of tradition and modernity. The story of the Ojibwa of the Grassy Narrows Indian Reserve raises timely and difficult questions about tradition, meaning, and human rights. These were questions raised in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, so the confluence in 1987-88 of an obscure centennial and a famous bicentennial may not be so inappropriate, after all.

Moreover, juxtaposing the two stor-

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ies, Farr's about the Blackfeet and Shkilnyk's about the Ojibwa, shows us something about cultural change and survival. The two authors, one a historian and the other a regional planner, hold two very different views of what constitutes the essential core of traditional culture, how fragile is that core, what are the dynamics of cultural change, and what is necessary for "cultural survival." In response to Farr's central question—"How much could Indian people change and yet remain essentially Indian?"—the two authors differ, and it is in those differences that we can find the issues for a broader discussion of authenticity, tradition, and modernization.

Farr's text is the briefer and simpler, in part because he and his collaborator, high school teacher Gary Schmautz, believe that the photographs they hunted down speak directly to us, showing "the world of the reservation honestly, without distorting the recorded reality through the prism of language or culture." Farr admits there are limitations in the assortment of photographs that survived (limitation such as the fact that almost all the photographers were white), but he confidently asserts that the photographs show us in the tiny details of a facial expression or of a modern item placed among the traditional artifacts the story of "Blackfeet people trying to cope with their changing world as Blackfeet."

The brief chapters and extensive captions for the photographs relate the essentials of the history of these upper Great Plains people. The Blackfeet really were four closely related tribes sharing a common language and similar customs and religious beliefs. The buffalo was crucial to the Blackfeet, not only for their material and spiritual sustenance but also after 1830 for their dealings with American whites through the buffalo robe trade. The first government treaty with the Blackfeet in 1855 followed the familiar pattern, establishing agriculture and reservation schools as the twin agents for civilizing and Christianizing the native people. The demise of the buffalo after 1880 sealed the fate of the Blackfeet, and those who survived the "Starvation Winter of 1883-84" proceeded in 1887 and again in 1895 to sell vast tracts of their Montana land in exchange for cash that the white financial custodians "stole, swindled, or wasted away."

The Blackfeet never recovered economically, and after 1900 they are not much more than victims of white disagreements over what would be the best economic course for the Indians, farming or cattle ranching. Those advocating ranching as the road to self-sufficiency eventually lost to those who saw farming as the best way to modernize the Blackfeet, but neither experiment worked. By 1920 two-thirds of the reservation population was on government rations. Although Farr does not go into the details of the later period, the reader assumes that not much has changed for the Blackfeet, that they are still bound in a pattern of dependency.

Farr may have been seduced by the visual nature of his evidence, but for whatever reason, he believes that "white modernity arrived via a succession of small and seemingly insignificant things." Farr reads in the appearance of boots, sewing machines, cloth coats, and a hundred other material things the gradual adoption of modern civilization. Given the choice between two interpretations of this evidence, one seeing a conversion to white ways and the other seeing a realistic adaptation of white means to Indian ends, Farr chooses the latter. The Blackfeet "ingeniously converted white practices to Indian sensibility," he insists. "There is continuity, to be sure, but it is deeper, more private, and more interior."

In a two-page "epilogue" Farr brings the story to the present. The young Blackfeet more rapidly abandon the reservation and their "home world"; they marry outside the group; they become more fully Americanized. Yet, says Farr, they remain Blackfeet at some private, interior core. Unfortunately, we have only Farr's word on that, and these last two pages are filled with the too-familiar romantic generalizations and views of "authenticity" that really beg his quite sensible initial question: How much and what sort of change makes a culture fundamentally different?

The strength of Shkilnyk's excellent book is that she does not beg the central question. Taking a leave of

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absence from her doctoral studies in urban and regional planning at MIT, Shkilnyk first visited the Grassy Narrows Indian Reserve (in Western Ontario) in 1976 as a consultant for the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs. Six years earlier scientists discovered severe methyl mercury pollution of the English-Wabigoon River system, the river that was crucial to the livelihood of the Ojibwa people on the reserve. The author was unprepared for what she found there. The methyl mercury poisoning, it turns out, was only "the last nail in the coffin" (as her Ojibwa informants liked to say), only the most recent of a string of shocks that began with the flu epidemic of 1919 and continued into recent history with the creation of residential schools, the destruction of traditional religion, and the 1962 relocation of the entire group from the old reserve to the new.

What Shkilnyk found that cold November afternoon in 1976 was a community disintegrating into the most horrible nightmare of "homelessness." In this small community of less than 600, where everyone was related by blood or marriage, she found a relentless pattern of personal violence, destructiveness, alcoholism, suicide, gang rape, incest, child abuse, child abandonment, and child neglect. The statistics are staggering, but what struck the author most was the "numbness of human spirit" she found at Grassy Narrows. These were, writes Shkilnyk, "a truly broken people."

The author relies upon anthropology, psychology, sociology, and economics to discover what happened to bring this community to such a state. With the help of native informants and anthropologists' monographs, Shkilnyk reconstructs what was the vital culture of these Ojibwa until the 1962 relocation. First, these people had a deep attachment to their place and to nature's rhythms. Second, they held great respect for the dignity of the individual. And, third, they valued the independence and self-sufficiency of the clan-based family group.

The family was the fundamental economic unit of the Ojibwa, relying upon the winter trapline. With few public institutions above the family unit, it was this home world of the family that provided the individual identity and support. The traditional ethos strongly valued sharing and mutual aid. The extended family also provided the rituals—the naming ceremony, the vision quest, the marriage ceremony, the funerary rituals—that sustained Ojibwa identity. There were no social classes or distinctions on the old reserve, no voluntary organizations, no community groups, no organized churches. The traditional Ojibwa valued autonomy and individualism.

All this changed with the 1962 move to the new reserve. The physical relocation stood for the larger public policy, so-called "community development," sustained by an ideology of modernization and committed to the expansion of social welfare and the integration of native people into Canadian life. White policymakers had already set things in motion decades earlier with the creation of residential schools. For the schools meant that families could no longer be out on the winter traplines, and with the demise of the traplines came the demise of an entire pattern and ethos of self-sufficiency. New rules for trapping, fishing, and the harvesting of wild rice in the late 1940's altered forever the economic autonomy of the community, and the 1963 building of a road connecting the new reserve with the nearest white town intensified Indian/white contact and racism.

The responsibilities of the community leaders, who previously were ideal role models of the Ojibwa, changed with the emergence of bureaucrats on the reserve. More importantly, the strong traditions of self-help, sharing, and mutual aid decayed into a pattern of dependency upon paternalistic outsiders. And there emerged social inequality distinguishing those who had steady jobs in the bureaucracy from those who were on the dole. The ethos of sharing transformed into an ethos of individual accumulation. The mercury poisoning of 300 miles of river system by Dryden Chemicals, Limited, destroyed commercial fishing and guiding, the last base for community economic independence, to say nothing of destroying the symbolic meaning of the river to the Ojibwa. Women, especially, were "victims of modernization" in this tragic story. They lost their power as producers and became passive consumers, actually expendable in the new society. The alcoholism, violence, suicide, rape, and child neglect Shkilnyk witnessed on the reserve were the visible evidence of the social pathology of this culture turned topsy-turvy.

Sadly, the Ojibwa knew what was happening to them but had no solutions to their dilemma. The native council repeatedly requested work programs, but the government continued the welfare system largely because it was simpler and cheaper to go with the inertia of the bureaucracy. The Ojibwa had made a Faustian bargain, trading their independence for limited material benefits. Seventy-eight percent of the Ojibwa polled said they were "not happy spiritually." What is left for them is not only a culture of poverty and dependence but the uncertainty of the medical consequences of the mercury poisoning of their immediate environment. And the Canadian government seems to the author to be fundamentally incapable of dealing "holistically with a shattered society."

So what is to be done? In her "postscript" Shkilnyk invokes an apt metaphor as she speaks to the Ojibwa: "If the external enabling conditions constitute the firewood for the renewal of a people, then the spark to light that fire has to come from within. The spark is the process by which a human being becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears for his own destiny." Philosophically, adds the author, "they have come to understand that a slave is also a man who waits for someone else to come and free him."

Shkilnyk as much makes this affirmation of human freedom and responsibility for her modern readers as for her native clients, for she sees Grassy Narrows as a microcosm of the destructive processes of modernization. We modern Americans are experiencing the same pathologies of violence, illness, suicide, family breakdown, child abuse, alcoholism, and drug abuse intensified in that small community that suffered so many catastrophes. These are the costs of modernity: "the loss of our moorings in faith and tradition; the loss of a sense of connection with the earth; alienation from meaningful work; and separation from a nurturing family and communal set-

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ting." Lacking the family or communal base, we tend to go it alone. In a sense, we are all Ojibwa.

Shkilnyk's final exhortation shows us how different from Farr's is her view of culture. Authentic Indianness for Farr lies in a private interior that is sustainable even amid the most pervasive settings of modern white society. In contrast, Shkilnyk sees culture as sustained only by a group and by its active performance of the everyday and special rituals of living.

Hers is a more accurate view, I think, one that raises some very interesting questions regarding tradition and modernity. For example, is there a human right (or, at least, a civil right) to a community tradition? Put differently, is it in the public interest to protect and preserve a community's traditions? If so, what public policies best achieve these goals, and who decides which traditions are worth saving? Finally, what happens to traditions when they are preserved due to extraordinary, perhaps "unnatural," efforts? Are they the same traditions they were in their natural settings, or have they become sterile shadows of what they once were?

These are very large questions, of course, but there are policymakers who must decide daily how they shall answer them, and the evidence shows their answers have been disastrous. Two interesting movements are worth mentioning as possible antidotes to the prevailing notion that "community development" means commitment to modernization. First is the "Mediating Structures and Public Policy" project directed a few years ago by Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus and described best in their short treatise *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (American Enterprise Institute, 1977). Berger is the sociologist who has given the most sustained thought to the public policy applications of the sociological understanding of modernity. He affirmed in a 1974 essay on patriotism the proposition that "Every human being has the right to his own tradition" and that "No one may be deprived of his childhood." The point of the mediating structures project is that it is the midrange institutions in our modern society—institutions such as neighborhood, family, church, and voluntary association—that are the modern carriers of traditions, values, meanings, and identity. Berger and Neuhaus recommend that public policy protect and empower those mediating institutions wherever possible.

Another development relevant to our thoughts about public policy responses to the collision between tradition and modernity is the relatively recent movement within the profession of folklorists to preserve and revitalize community traditions through "folklore and folklife festivals." Often using public funding, folklorists gather traditional "folk" artists and performers for a few days' worth of music, crafts, dancing, cooking, and storytelling. The public is invited to these festivals, and attendance has been heavy. The festivals and the "living museum" movement (also popular among folklorists) aim not only at preserving folk traditions but even at reviving traditions that have "died."

Some folklorists raise serious doubts about folk festivals, worrying that "staged traditions" and an unreflective pursuit of "authenticity" do not add up to viable cultures. Traditions preserved under artificial circumstances, these skeptics argue, are not up to the important work living traditions do in terms of sustaining meaning in a community. Worse, these festivals may be

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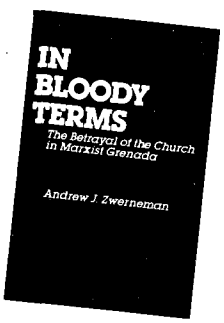

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merely a new version of Disneyland, where alienated modern tourists can glimpse briefly a purportedly "authentic" tradition before returning to their sterile institutional lives.

This debate among folklorists comes down to the practical question of whether anything can be done in a community like Grassy Narrows. Once traditions die at the hands of modernity, can they be revived? If so, then what sort of public policy would empower the community to pursue this new vision of "community development," one committed not to modernization but to the recovery of what it means to be Ojibwa? If not, if Grassy Narrows is lost forever, then what shall we learn from this tragedy that will help us avoid the Grassy Narrows disasters no doubt already in the making? Shkilnyk's book offers chilling witness to the view that the survival of traditions is not only a human right, it is a human necessity. We must sort out the puzzling dilemmas the collision of tradition and modernity forces upon us, certainly for the sake of the members of those future Grassy Narrows, but for our own sakes as well. cc

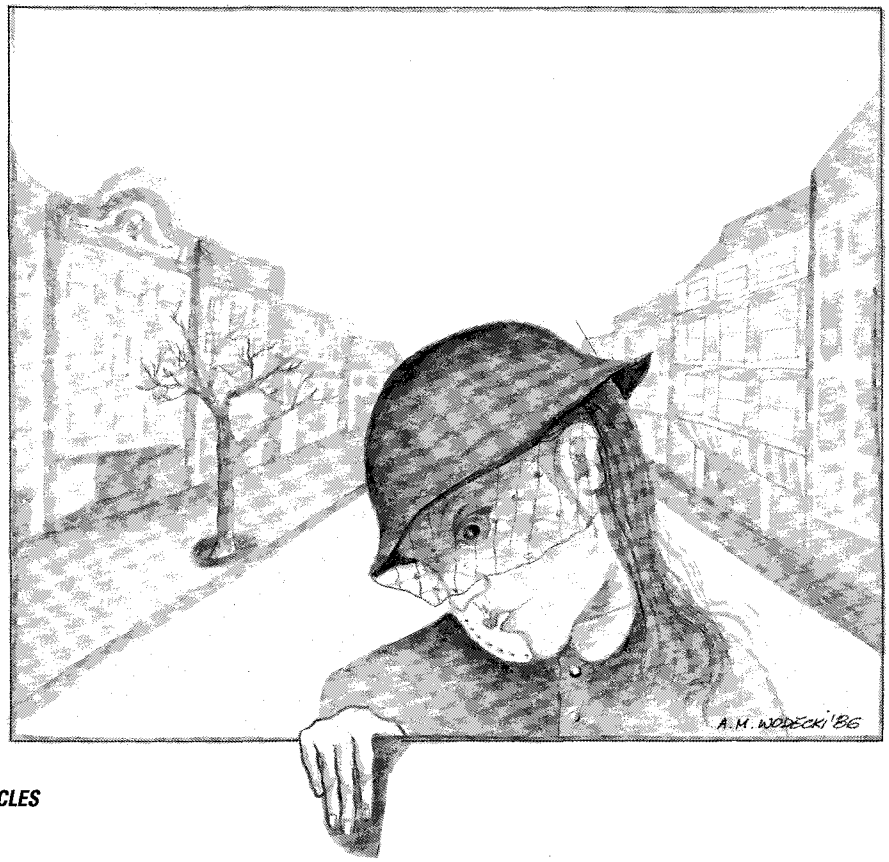
Small-Town Schizophrenia *by Allan C. Carlson*

"I see the rural virtues leave the land."
—Oliver Goldsmith

Lake Wobegon Days by Garrison Keillor, New York: Viking Press.

Garrison Keillor, the writer, has finally made it big. Five years ago a regional cult figure and occasional contributor to the *New Yorker*, Keillor has now vaulted on to the cover of *Time* and to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list. His devout followers range from professors weaned on the Weavers and Pete Seeger who plan their Saturday evenings around his *A Prairie Home Companion* radio show to the Jesse Helms aide who labeled Keillor the most hopeful cultural sign of the decade. For a nation still bearing the scars left by the conflicts of the 1960's and 70's, he seems to be the promised balm of Gilead.

What accounts for his appeal? *Lake Wobegon Days*, Keillor's fictional account of growing up in a mythical Minnesota small town, provides answers. Partly, it lies in his wry Midwestern humor. Keillor's chapter-length history of his town, a gentle, barely exaggerated spoof of the standard chronicle of ten thousand American hamlets, begins with the story of Unitarian missionary Prudence Alcott ("She had a vision of a man in hairy clothing who told her to go west and convert the Indians to Christianity by the means of interpretive dance"). It passes through the town's era as New Albion, the Boston of the West ("Home of New Albion College, World Revered Seat of Learning Set in This Mecca of Commerce and Agriculture"), and concludes with a portrayal of late-19th-century Lake Wobegon as the quintessentially American offspring of religious devotion bound to hucksterism and speculation.



Keillor also taps the corporate memory, recounting the common experiences of a child growing up in mid-20th-century America. He relates the agony of waiting to be chosen during a school baseball game, as the captains —a natural elite—finally get down to the scrubs, the "near-handicapped." He describes the humiliation of wearing black Keds ("Mother said black wouldn't show dirt") when white ones were popular. He recalls the subtle terror of a bitter Midwestern winter as "the cold swallows up sound except for your feet crunching and your heart pounding."

The author has a keen eye for the details of small-town life: the seed caps, low belts, and big bellies on the men; the deep purple pant suit, purple pumps, and jet black wig of a desperately aging, incompletely citified grandmother; the literary society featuring lectures on World Federalism, Esperanto, and unicameral legislatures.

Finally, Keillor can tell an anecdote

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with a poignancy matched by few contemporary American writers: his description of his "Storm Home" in town, his "storm parents," the Kloeckels, and his imaginary visit to them as the refugee storm child; Elizabeth the phone operator's recounting of the time Keillor's grandfather took her out into a cold winter's night to see a silver wolf sitting on a snowbank; and Mr. Dahl, who keeps a 1943 calendar girl smiling above his workbench, reminding him of his youthful wife.

Yet Keillor has turned his considerable talents toward deeper themes. Thematically, he has drawn on the rich literary traditions of O.E. Rölvaag, Vilhelm Moberg, and other chroniclers of the Scandinavian migration to the upper Midwest. He has also joined in the popular revival of romantic agrarianism, evidenced in films such as *Country* and *The River*. Old Southern Agrarians such as Andrew Lytle and Richard Weaver would recognize a co-celebrant in Keillor's portrayal of the rural pieties. So would Wendell Berry, the contemporary novelist whose writing in defense of agrarian culture is marred only by a preference for unimaginative policy responses. Further to the left, Keillor resonates with the bioregional movement, small bands of radical ecologists seeking to transform themselves into "new natives" of rural America.

At this deeper level, too, the great irony of *A Prairie Home Companion* and *Lake Wobegon Days* emerges: the radio show, the host and author, and his essays and books celebrate the small town, rural values, and folk-culture. Yet their primary audience is not found in villages, on farms, or among the agrarian and laboring classes. Rather, it is professors of English, stockbrokers, artists, corporate lawyers, and inhabitants of San Francisco and New York that worship at the Lake Wobegon altar. Where the historic models for Keillor's show, the old National Barn Dance and the Grand Ole Opry, had authentic bonds to the rural culture they evoked, *A Prairie Home Companion* is a show for intellectuals and the upper-middle class.

More than a kind of rural slumming lies behind this peculiar fact. Keillor is smart enough to play upon the deep split in the modern American soul: the schizophrenia over the small-town America that remains, despite a century of urbanization, the dominant metaphor of the national experience.

Keillor praises the small town, the place where immigrants came "to maintain their honest rural way of life." He notes that when the Thanatopsis Club held its centennial in 1982 and wrote the White House for a Presidential essay on small-town life, it received back a letter extolling Lake Wobegon as a model of free enterprise and individualism. But the truth is, writes Keillor, that "Lake Wobegon survives to the extent that it does on a form of voluntary socialism. . . . You need a toaster, you buy it at Co-op Hardware even though you can get a deluxe model . . . for less money at K-Mart in St. Cloud. You buy it at Co-op because you know Otto." The small town rests on the principle of loyalty, and a renunciation of individualism, excessive material goods, and the competitive edge. In this town "smart doesn't count for much," and the clearly superior soprano in the Lutheran choir takes care not to sing too loudly: being good enough, but not too good, is what really matters.

Lake Wobegon is also a locale where one plants trees, works hard, marries, produces children, and is content with having little more. It is a way-of-life that binds the individual into a community of shared experience and common obligation, making every action social in nature because it has clear reverberations throughout the town. It is a human construct requiring successive generations to live out the same life patterns, so that a youth's visit to the warming house at the ice rink brings the shocking revelation that the inscriptions on the walls were put there by his parents and grandparents, once young and love-struck just like himself.

Threatening this world is the cosmopolitan life and infectious individualism of the metropolis. Keillor describes a Lake Wobegon father who avoided driving through the Twin Cities, planning trips "like he was crossing enemy lines, skirting the main forces, looking for the gaps to break through into open country." In an autobiographical section, Keillor relates his own early months at the University of Minnesota, accompanied by his dog from home: "My old black mutt reminded me of a whole string of allegiances and loyalties, which school seemed to be trying to jiggle me free of. My humanities instructor, who sounded to be from someplace east of East, had a talent for saying 'Minnesota' as if it were 'moose turds.'" Frequent references are made in the book to the corrosive impact on Lake Wobegon of the modern liberal church, offering a religion where "God is the gentle mist rising from the meadow and the smile on a child's face." Similarly, the "dull rapture" of television is shown dissolving family bonds. Keillor describes the Kreugers watching the Perry Como Christmas Special, sipping martinis: "A dismal scene compared to church, people leaning forward to catch the words coming from their children's mouths, their own flesh and blood, once babes in arms, now speaking the Gospel."

Yet Keillor also denigrates the small town. Central to the book is a 23-page footnote, purportedly the remnants of "95 Theses" penned in 1980 by an unnamed exile from Lake Wobegon. Behind an element of satire lies deep criticism, even bitterness. The "author" blasts town folk who taught him to worship a God who is like them, to "feel shame and disgust about my own body," and to hold "an indecent fear of sexuality." He blasts the religious intolerance of family and friends who took pride "in the great privilege of having been born Lutheran." The writer decries male role models such as the members of the Sons of Knute and the Booster Club whose "petulence, inertia, and ineptitude are legendary." He condemns the town for its devotion to hard work as a guard against corruption, and its preference for suffering over pleasure ("Birth control was never an issue with us. Nor was renunciation of pleasures of the flesh. We never enjoyed them in the first place").

The author notes with contempt that "you taught me not to be 'unusual' for fear of what the neighbors would say." The inhabitants of Lake Wobegon, he laments, had a set view of the Universe and "knew what everything and everybody was," whether they had seen them or not. Indians were drunks, Jews were thieves, the colored were shiftless, and so on. Such small-town folk were unaware of the

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"deprivation and injustice in the world." They clung to the pre-welfare state belief that whatever happens to people is the latters' own fault and that if suffering people had been more like Lake Wobegonians, "they would have been all right."

In the end, the author of the 95 Theses lies awash in alienation and self-hatred. He has grown to detest neat-looking people like himself, people who appear industrious and respectable. He sneers at them as middle-class. In elections, he votes automatically against Scandinavian names. Instead, he has become a "sensitive person" and has thrown his lot in with the renovators of Victorian houses, the singer-songwriters, the runners, the connoisseurs of northern Bengali cuisine. Nonetheless, the result is misery: "I don't really see anybody."

Keillor records: "Most of Lake Wobegon's children leave, as I did, to realize themselves as finer persons than they were allowed to be at home." Haunting the teenage boy in *Lake Wobegon Days* are the Flambeaus, a fictional family of detectives who lived in a Manhattan apartment and did what they felt like doing, when they felt like doing it. "There is no noon siren in Manhattan when everyone has to sit down immediately and eat a hot beef sandwich, no six o'clock siren when you dig into a tuna casserole made with cream of mushroom soup." Instead, young Tony Flambeau sipped wine with his parents and called them by their first names. Why couldn't his family be more like the Flambeaus? the barely disguised Keillor asks.

As moderns, the youth of Lake Wobegon rebel against the closed community, the *Gemeinschaft*, which tried to govern their every public act and prejudice. The security and senses of meaning and place which the American small town delivered demanded too great a price from them.

In his private life, Keillor exemplifies these legions of émigrés. The autobiographical Keillor was in early conflict with the small-town ethos. "Two years a scout and I still hadn't made Tenderfoot." As the Scoutmaster lectured his disobedient charges on the dishonor they brought the uniform, Keillor acknowledges that it "made no sense to me. What honor?" From an early age, he was "the writer" who lived events deeply. As an adult, his household could hardly have been modeled on the Lake Wobegon virtues. Like the majority of his listeners, Keillor evokes the small town for two hours each week, yet himself lives as a deracinated urban man. Indeed, during a show broadcast from San Francisco several years ago, he made a point of reassuring his auditorium audience that the values of Lake Wobegon were timeworn, often cruel, obsolete.

Perhaps *Lake Wobegon Days* and *A Prairie Home Companion* ought to be seen as religious exercises, a kind of First Church of Nostalgia. As one of his characters puts it: "The whole town is like . . . a cult." The radio show, too, has the structure and cadence of a Lutheran church service: the first hour devoted to a liturgy of music and short readings; the second hour encompassing Keillor's monologue sermon, followed by a hymn or two and benediction. Even the timing is instructive: Saturday evenings, 5 to 7 p.m., so that

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worship need not interfere with other plans for the night. As Keillor notes, it is the ones lured away by the pleasures of modernity "who can afford to be nostalgic." Lake Wobegon is the lost American Eden, the community abandoned in the pursuit of other forms of happiness.

In the library at Lake Wobegon High is still to be found a globe, the gift of the Class of 1917, representing "a world that no longer existed." Small-town America, the Norman Rockwell vision, seems similarly fated. "You know," says Elmer, one of the Sons of Knute, "I don't think nothing is ever going to be what it was ever again. We've about seen the last of it. I'm getting too damn old."

During the 1970's the Census Bureau told us that, in a trend unseen since the Great Depression, there was a migration of Americans back to the small towns and farms. The old world seemed to be in the process of restoration. Data from the 1980's, though, suggests that that return is over, that the flow of people is once again toward the suburbs and cities. Torn asunder by the rapid collapse of the rural economy, the authentic Lake Wobegons dotting the upper Midwest are becoming the new American ghost towns.

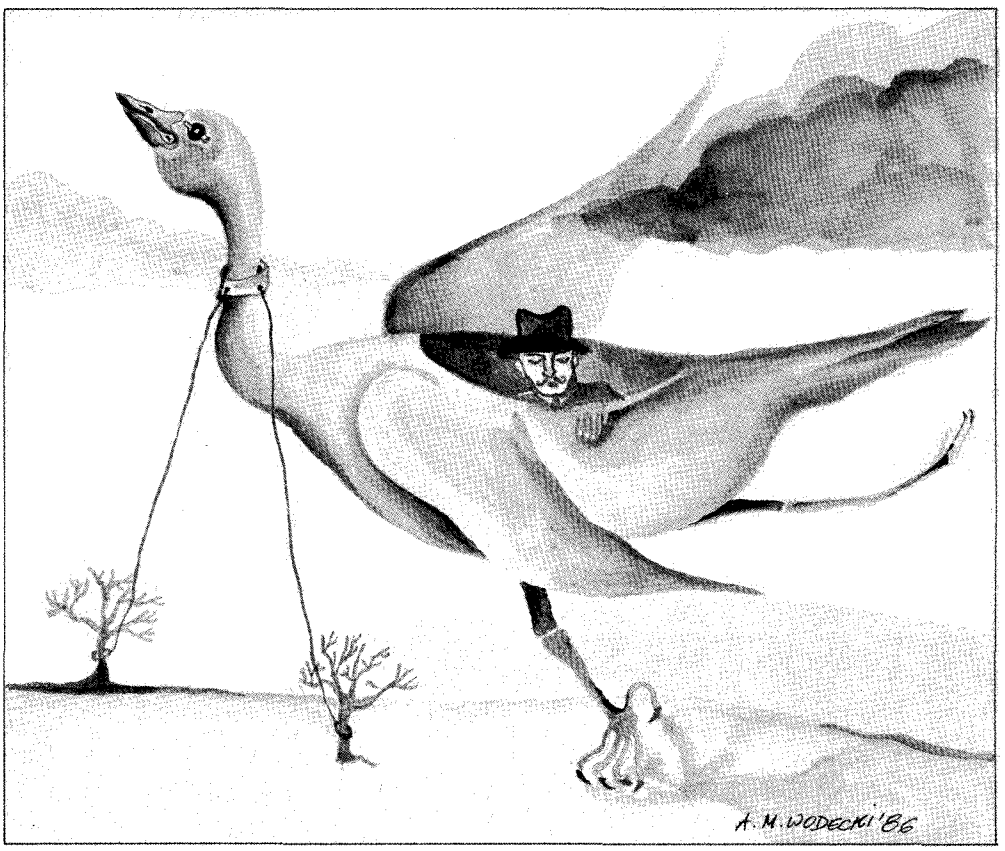
The small town as reality is dying; it lives on as myth, and ideology. cc

Broken Eggshells & Winged Seeds *by John Lukacs*

"Imaging . . . is properly the work of a poet; the [rest] he borrows from the historian."

—John Dryden

Son of the Morning Star **by Evan S. Connell, New York: Harper & Row, $8.95.**



Here is an unAmerican story. A young man writes a successful novel. Thousands of Americans, in the oddest places, esteem it highly. So do the most reputable publishers in New York. When he attempts the sequel of that novel it fails. This happens during a decade when everything in American culture turns against his grain. He is shy and withdrawn. He is interested in writing, not in writership. His very style is "outdated." He writes prose poems, short stories, and essays. Twenty-five years after his first novel he tries his hand at something of a new genre. It is printed by a small press in California. Its fame spreads by word of mouth. It is eminently successful. He is now 61 years old, with money in the bank.

This is the capsule story of the work of Evan Connell, to whom Fame and Fortune have come late and Truth early, a sequence that is much preferable to the other way around. (Fame and Fortune coming too early soon amount to disaster, as does Truth when it comes too late.) So there *are* Second Acts for American writers, after all.

My purpose is not to record but to describe his achievement. The contents of *Son of the Morning Star* are well-known. It is a summing-up of the mystery—if mystery it is—of why and how General Custer led his troop into a valley of death. It is a story which has been retold and argued by Western historians a hundred times. But Connell's achievement is not only that he knows much about it and tells it well. There are three important elements in this achievement. One is Connell's clear, sinewy, manly American prose—yet without traces of that assertive (assertive, because self-conscious) Americanism that bristles

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in the prose of Mark Twain or Hemingway. It is American English at its best, in part because—because and not in spite of—the condition that its writer is aware of the connectedness of the New World to the Old (a historical sense which abounds, too, in his prose poems and essays).

The second important element is this writer's tactic. He is telling and retelling a complex story from the perspective of its different participants, in which way the history of the Little Bighorn becomes revealed through the compounding of the stories of Custer, Captain Benteen, Major Reno, Mrs. Custer, Sitting Bull, *et al.* Lawrence Durrell tried something like this in his *Alexandria Quartet*, and Paul Scott in his *Raj Quartet*. But *Son of the Morning Star* is a military history. Connell's tactic and approach are somewhat similar to that of the English military historian John Keegan in *Six Faces of Battle*; but that book compares to *Son of the Morning Star* in the way Scrabble compares to a crossword puzzle. In reading Connell we are in the presence of a master.

So we come to the most important matter. *Son of the Morning Star* is a history. It is a history not written by a professional historian, and it is a history mostly based on secondary sources. This no longer matters, because the once serious and categorical distinctions between "professional" and "amateur" historians, and between "primary" and "secondary" sources are largely outdated. What matters is something else: that *Son of the Morning Star* is not, as some critics praised it, "history by a novelist," nor is it a "nonfiction novel." Yes, the instrument is Connell's descriptive, and imaginative, prose: but the material is history and not something invented either by the author's mind or something that he puts into the minds and the mouths of his protagonists. There is no trace of "psychohistory" in this reconstruction, save in the sense in which every historian worth his salt is a walking psychologist, that is, a knower of human nature. And there is no invention in it either: no artifacts a la Gore Vidal or movie-script confections a la E.L. Doctorow or fake-historical reportages in the manner of Norman Mailer or Herman Wouk or Irwin Shaw or William Styron.

In the "nonfiction novel," the "documentary," the "docudrama" scenes are invented, people are invented, conversations are invented, what went on in people's conscious and subconscious minds are invented. But these inventions are not the products of a superior imagination. They are the easy way out. The route which Connell has followed (Ortega: "Genius is the ability to invent one's own occupation") is the more difficult and, in reality, the more imaginative one. It is the reconstruction of a story (in many Latin languages "story" and "history" are the same words) which consists entirely of people who really lived, from the residual evidence of what they really did and said and thought. It is a special gift of intelligence (again: "intelligence" means literally the ability to read between lines) and of a kind of historical imagination that can vitalize those residues.

Connell and many other writers now have one thing in common. They are more and more interested in history. All of the superficial evidence and accepted ideas to the contrary, there exists now a large appetite for history, unprecedented in many places, but perhaps especially in the United States. This appetite, *faute de mieux*, is being fed by all kinds of junk food. Most academic historians are blissfully unaware of it. Other people (including popular writers such as James Michener), certain publishers, television producers, *et al.*, sense it but do not know what it means. What it means is that the historical form of thought is one of the few things now that can give us a mental connection with reality. The great historian Johan Huizinga recognized this odd compound of an atmosphere of consummate lies together with the congealment of a widespread consciousness of history. Already 50 years ago he wrote that "like smoke and petrol fumes over the cities, there hangs over the world a haze of empty words"; but he also wrote then that "historical thinking has entered our very blood." It is a consequence of this that 50 years later meaningful prose has become more and more historical.

The essential difference between Connell and the above-mentioned writers is that, unlike the latter, Connell seems *to know* this. He probably knows that it is possible to write a story in which every "fact" may be accurate and yet the general impression of which is false. This is because a fact does not exist in our minds except through its associations; because it has no meaning except through its statement; and because the statement of every fact depends on its purpose. Therefore, the purpose of writing a piece of history could not be really the final, fixed, definite establishment of "factual truth" but—as Thucydides intimated—the reduction of untruth. And what is the purpose of that purpose itself, of the reduction of untruth? It is not principally that of enlightenment or entertainment or even of instruction. It is one of *reminder*. We have to remind people of some things that they, in one way or another, already know. Yes, every novel is a historical novel; yes, fact and fiction overlap. But an evolution has occurred.

A century ago Thomas Hardy wrote that "conscientious fiction alone it is which can excite a reflecting and abiding interest in the minds of thoughtful readers of mature age, who are weary of puerile inventions and famishing for accuracy; who consider that in representations of the world, the passions ought to be proportioned as in the world itself. This is the interest which was excited in the minds of the Athenians by their immortal tragedies, and in the minds of Londoners at the first performances of the finer plays three hundred years ago." I am convinced that *conscientious history* is now replacing that desideratum which Hardy stated as conscientious fiction. It is history which can excite a reflecting and abiding interest in the minds of thoughtful readers of mature age, who are weary (and how weary we are!) of "puerile inventions" while they are "famishing for accuracy"—or, should I say, for reality and truth.

History, like the novel, does not have a language of its own. It is thought, imagined, taught, spoken, and written in our everyday languages. Those academic historians who proceed from the assumption that there are documents and historical documents, sources and historical sources, reconstructions and historical reconstructions, are only self-serving: they think that the writing of history should be reserved to professional historians

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writing for other professional historians. Those novelists who, during the last 25 years, have been mixing "fact" and "fiction," by including bigger and bigger—and usually undigested—chunks of history in their books, are no good either. None of them has, as yet, succeeded in creating a fine example of a new genre. The mixing of fact and fiction in their books has been usually indiscriminating and illegitimate to the extents of sloppiness and dishonesty—as indeed on television and in the movies.

Now *Son of the Morning Star* may not be a great, classic work. But it is more than a minor masterpiece. What Connell achieved is a kind of breakthrough—a minor breakthrough, to be sure, but a breakthrough nonetheless—through the border country overlapping not only the more modern realms of "professionals" and "amateurs" but the more ancient realms of History and Biography and Novel. This border country is not a jungle and no longer a no-man's-land, because the once rigid and fixed delineations of those frontiers no longer serve.

Connell found his way through the border country. But then this is where and how and why he had started more than 25 years ago. There is a curious epigraph by Walt Whitman on the inside title page of *Mrs. Bridge* (1959), Evan Connell's first novel. It reads: "But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?" There is a direct connection between this cryptic motto and *Mrs. Bridge* and what Connell achieved in *Son of the Morning Star*. Like every serious writer, Connell has been plagued by the elusive character of historical truth—more precisely, by the difficult task of its pursuit. His pursuit, already evident in the two Bridge books, followed the tactic of approach whereby the same story, or at least much of the story, is redescribed (that is, not merely retold) from the perspectives of the different protagonists. I said that in *Son of the Morning Star* this has "worked" very well. But there is more to that.

Mrs. Bridge, for example, ought to be required reading in classes of American history as well as in classes of American literature, because it describes not so much how certain Americans looked and what they did and how they talked, but what they thought and what they felt in a certain time and in a certain place. These people, unlike the people described by such different writers as John P. Marquand or Sinclair Lewis or John O'Hara, are not stereotypes. *Mrs. Bridge* consists of 117 short chapters or vignettes, written in an extraordinary spare and succinct prose (how different from the logorrhea of the 1960's!). Mrs. Bridge and her family are Americans in Kansas City. At least 115 of these 117 vignettes take place between, say, 1928 and 1942. *Mrs. Bridge* is not really about the Depression and the New Deal and the Second World War, nor is it—contrary to many of its reviewers' notions—really about upper-middle-class life in Kansas City.

The habits of the Bridges' class and the great events of the winding world intrude in their lives and in their conversations. Yet the main scope of this book is the description of certain American sensitivities of a race and of a generation. I am using this dangerously unfashionable word "race" because the Bridges are Anglo-Saxon Americans. We know nothing about Mrs. Bridge's ancestors; she is wholly absorbed by her family; she shows no interest in genealogy; she is a desultory book reader and does not seem to have much interest in history. Yet when her husband takes her to England on their only trip abroad, Connell describes her in a passage of beautiful depth which, in my opinion, is unequaled in American literature because of its scope, and which rings, at least in my mind, like a bourdon bell of a great sunken vision of a time now past:

> They landed at Southampton long before dawn and took the train to London. It was a rainy morning and most of the passengers dozed, but Mrs. Bridge stayed awake and stared out of the train window, a trifle groggily, at the silent, stately, fogbound farmland. And as this train carried her across the English countryside, past cottages she had never seen and would never see again, where great birds nested in the chimney crook, and from the hedgerows smaller birds came fluttering in sheer desperation to circle twice, and then, finding nothing, to settle as before, and where the cattle in the mist grazed unperturbed by the train which rolled on and on beneath the somnolent English sky, as though there were no destination, past the rain-drenched, redolent fields, and the trees which cast no shadow, she thought to herself how familiar it was and that once this must have been her home. Yes, she said to herself slowly, yes, I was here before.

This is one-half of those vignettes and typical of Evan Connell at his best. The few vignette-chapters about Europe that follow, the Bridges in Paris, Monte Carlo, Rome, are not among his best: Innocents Abroad. And yet they fit with the tone of the book. India and Walter Bridge are innocents. But they are not like Babbitt or Dodsworth. Yes, Kansas City is the center of their universe, just as Zenith was the center of the universe for Sinclair Lewis' antiheroes; but the Bridges do not think that their Kansas City is the center of the world. The center of their center is their family. What the Bridges represent is the bourgeois interlude in the history of the United States, a phase that lasted, at the most, from about 1890 to 1950, the only time in the 300-year history of an ever-changing people when their culture was mostly bourgeois and urban.

Mrs. Bridge is a gentle, honest, and thoroughly kind woman. She is obsessed with respectability—at the expense of her mind but not of her heart. Her story is consequently a sad one: but not only because of the perennial human condition whereby gentleness and kindness seldom flower for long in this world. Her story is sad because her kind of gentility and probity and kindness are woefully thin and impractical, and not only because of those changing customs and mores to which, like so many other kind and gentle Americans, she feels that she ought to adjust her opinions, if not her heart. Critics who praised *Mrs. Bridge* praised Evan Connell's satirical talents, describing his portraiture as "sly." They were

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wrong. Connell is full of respect for Mrs. Bridge; and while Connell's mind and prose are often ironic, there is a world of difference between the profound understanding of human nature latent within irony and the necessarily sharp and brilliant artifices of satire.

Ten years after *Mrs. Bridge* came *Mr. Bridge* (1968). Connell was enough of a novelist to realize that characters are more complicated than plots; and it was perhaps his historical sense that made him realize, too, that plots are, by necessity, one-dimensional, and that therefore they must be seen and retold from different human angles. He tried this in *Mr. Bridge*, where he failed. He failed for the reason that *Mr. Bridge*, more than *Mrs. Bridge*, is a portrait of a man, rather than a description of a certain time. In *Mrs. Bridge* the portrait and the atmosphere have their equivalences; in *Mr. Bridge* they do not. *Mr. Bridge* fails because of the success of Walter Bridge's portraiture within *Mrs. Bridge*. Reading *Mrs. Bridge* one does not only come to know her husband intimately and in detail: the very picture of Walter Bridge—that tall, angular, thinly red-haired, spare and slightly paunchy Kansas City lawyer; and this in the prose of a writer who usually does not care to describe the physical appearances of his characters in great detail—is complete.

Of course *Mr. Bridge* may be read and enjoyed separately from its predecessor: but because of *Mrs. Bridge*, *Mr. Bridge* became an unnecessary book. It has, however, its high points. In one of its vignettes, Connell describes the uneasy evening when Walter Bridge is made aware—forcefully, crampedly made aware—by his faithful secretary Julia that she has been in love with him. Julia is on the way to old-maidenhood. She lives with her older sister. She fails to seduce Walter Bridge to their apartment.

> He had never inquired how she felt about this. It was easy to imagine, just as it was easy to imagine the interior of their apartment. [There follows a description of its genteel clutter.] . . . all the junk two unmarried sisters would collect to prevent themselves from admitting the truth. No doubt the place smelled of medicine. Tokens of poor health littering the rooms like a bird's nest sprinkled with broken eggshells.

Walter Bridge may be a stuffy old bird but he is not a fool; and Evan Connell is a fine writer, not the least because he knows how to use his eye and his nose, too.

And now 15 years pass before the Morning Star appears. Much water has flown under the Bridges, and by the nature of things, much that Evan Connell wrote was overlooked and soon forgotten. Perhaps *Saint Augustine's Pigeon* (1980) is the best selection of his short stories. But Evan Connell is not a short-story writer. He creates characters rather than plots; what is more important, his vision is too large for the short story. This is especially so in his two long short stories and his two short novels about a recurrent character named Muhlbach living near or in the Waste Land of New York, where Muhlbach would like to but really can't eat the proverbial peach.

Perhaps the best of his stories are the two successive ones ("The Walls of Avila" and "The Palace of Moorish Kings") about the recounting of foreign travels by one J.D. among a group of his former friends in Kansas City who are respectful and rueful and, in the end, resentful of him because he has returned to them in the end, without a cent to his name, to settle down to a humdrum married life. There are splendid sentences ("Through the picture window we could see a maple loaded like a treasure galleon with red gold") and very good passages in it ("Our childhood came and went before we were ready to grasp it. Things were different now. The winged seeds that gyrate down from the trees now mean nothing else but that we must sweep them from the automobile hood because stains on the finish lower the trade-in value. Now, in short, it was impractical to live as we used to live with the abandon of a mule rolling in the dust").

The odd thing is that Connell's two book-length prose poems, *Notes From a Bottle Found on the Beach at Carmel* (1962) and *Points for a Compass Rose* (1973), are less poetic than some of these passages. Save for their typographical arrangement and their cryptic intensity, they are not really poems. They have something in common with Pound's *Cantos*, but they are infinitely more coherent than the *Cantos*. They have something in common, too, with the dark Far Western pessimism of Robinson Jeffers. They have the qualities of an incomplete mosaic, suffused with historical knowledge and speculation. They may be read with profit at random. Evan Connell is a master of historical and poetic prose rather than of prosaic and historical verse.

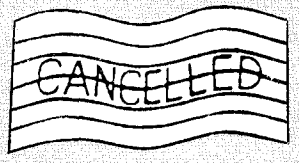
Whether he is aware of that we cannot tell. But there is evidence that he is aware of how all prose belongs now within the Kingdom of History—even though we must recognize that the latter is not a centralized sovereignty but a governing confederation. Therein, in these dreamy times of ours, lies a great promise. And outrider of that promise is *Son of the Morning Star*. cc

LIBERAL ARTS

The Critic's Lash

Some authors can't take constructive criticism. Shelley blamed Keats's death on hostile critics, and Gordon Rogoff, writing in *American Theater*, explains Tennessee Williams' frenetic life-style as an answer to critic/biographer Donald Spoto:

> Isn't it just possible that the wicked, exploitive, sexual Williams, leaping over towns, countries and beds in the company of beautiful, exploitive [sic], unquestioning boys was merely running away from stuffy Spotos telling him incessantly how *not* to write a play?



Keats took the easy way out. cc

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COMMENDABLES

A Fragile Blossom

by W. Brent Christensen

Feng Jicai: *Chrysanthemums and Other Stories*; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego; $19.95.

Feng Jicai's volume of short stories is truly a remarkable work. It is one of the first publications by a writer in the People's Republic of China in which the writer has allowed people to be people. The reader does not find the stereotypical characters of proletarian literature in Feng's stories; instead, these tales are filled with believable characters living lives of quiet desperation. Though uneven in quality and development, Feng's writing is infused with a light humor and gentle satire. This is extraordinarily candid writing for modern China, but one can still see the restraint of a writer in a totalitarian state.

In the Yan'an Forum of 1942, Mao set forth the guidelines for China's revolutionary literature, and after the "liberation" of the Chinese Mainland in 1949, literature was carefully controlled. Mao declared that there were only two kinds of human nature—that of the proletarian and that of the bourgeoisie. The result was the virtual disappearance of literature for the next 30 years. All of the great modern Chinese writers—including Ba Jin, Shen Cungwen, and Gwo Moro—were silenced. From this silence have emerged a few courageous voices. Feng writes, "There are basic factors in nature that go beyond cultural differences, or class differences. While people exist in a social situation, they exist there in all the complexity of nature, which if we are to be realistic, we cannot minimize."

Feng peoples his world with hapless victims of the society in which they live. In "The Mao Button," we meet a foolish little man seeking status in a "classless" world by having the biggest Mao button of all. In "Chrysanthemums" an artist discovers the meaning of friendship and the grace of beauty only after the strong tides of Chinese politics have crushed his pride and driven him to the edge of despair. But the most gripping of the stories is "A Letter," a realistic study of the anxiety and paranoia of a weak-willed historian who loses an indiscreet letter and is politically betrayed.

Despite dark pictures of lives in uncertainty and turmoil, Feng injects a subtle humor into his writing. His story "Numbskull" depicts an amusing encounter between a radio repairman in search of a bigger apartment and a wheeling-dealing black marketeer. Even the bleaker stories have glimpses of humor—a zealous informant reporting someone to the Party for gargling with *hot* water or an over-anxious lover hilariously misreading his correspondence.

It is essential to understand the precarious position from which Feng is writing. The literary climate in China has alternated back and forth: the pendulum swings between periods of relative creative freedom and periods of crushing brutality and ideological rigidity. China is currently allowing a measure of outspokenness, though significant restrictions remain. The tension is reflected in "Plum Blossoms in the Snow," a story that implies that even though there was terrible suffering in the Cultural Revolution (now publicly criticized by government officials), things are all right now. A different perspective is found in the stories of Chen Jo-hsi, a writer who lived through the Cultural Revolution and escaped to the West to write about it. Her fiction makes it clear that the Cultural Revolution was consistent with the political system which produced it. Writing from within the system, Feng cannot make such a connection.

Feng does make a few oblique stabs at the system itself, though. In "A Letter," he offers a daring description of an oppressive political officer: "People like him were bred by an abnormal society, and they in turn contributed to its malaise." But then he blunts his point by adding, "In those years when work was not valued, his kind proliferated." In another story, Feng satirizes the hypocrisy of a mayor who ceremonially sweeps the streets of his city, but again he fails to direct his criticism at the regime itself.

Some of the stories in this collection do lack substance and thematic force: "Winding Brook Way" treats the problem of pollution with predictable sentimentality, while "Nectar" and "A Street Sweeping Show" wander aimlessly about. However, the stronger stories glow with the talent of a developing writer, and the human qualities of the characters transcend the narrowly defined classes required of communist literature. Susan Wilf Chen's translation is excellent, faithful to the tone of Feng's writing. The reader can only hope that the political climate will allow this important Chinese writer to write more of the true experiences and feelings of his people. ∞

W. Brent Christensen is a captain in the U.S. Air Force and a graduate student in East Asian studies at George Washington University.

Fathoming Seas of Red

***Yearbook on International Communist Affairs, 1985: Parties and Revolutionary Movements*, edited by Richard F. Staar, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.**

Unlike the world of democratic politics with its ever-present television cameras and investigative reporters, the world of communism is a realm of mysteries and shadows, understood by few who do not actually hold power. Richard Staar and the 79 regional specialists who have contributed to this encyclopedic volume have performed an invaluable public service by sifting through the available documents and reports to give readers a country-by-country assessment of the people and policies currently guiding the communist world. An excellent biography and tables of key officers and organizations make this an especially useful reference work. Taken together, the yearbook presents a depressing panorama of tyranny and repression, economic collapse and food shortages, intrigue and infighting. Yet here and there signs of hope persist:

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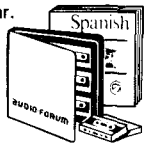

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dissent and protests in Eastern Europe; stubborn resistance in Afghanistan and Nicaragua; reluctant experimentation in China. International Communism is hardly in retreat, but its worldwide triumph is still far from assured. cc

Affliction and Redemption

George A. Panichas: *The Burden of Vision: Dostoevsky's Spiritual Art*; Gateway Editions; Chicago.

Fyodor Dostoevsky is among the pioneers of modern literature. However, like so many of the pioneers —particularly T.S. Eliot—he is acknowledged with ambivalence and even reluctance. Like *The Waste Land*, Dostoevsky's works are prized for their subtle exploration of modern despair and alienation. Like Eliot, Dostoevsky is celebrated as a daring technical innovator and a superb craftsman. But as with Eliot (as well as Yeats, Faulkner, and Claudel), there remains the embarrassing problem of a modern artist whose investigation of the human condition leads him into the realms of the spirit. When most contemporary critics see a religious meaning striding toward them down the dark and narrow corridors of Dostoevsky's fiction, they frantically look about for escape into some side door opening onto formalism, psychology, or sociology. Some critics solve the dilemma by conceding the label "Christian existentialist" to the Russian master but then quietly employing an exclusively existentialist commentary to leach away the bitter faith.

In George A. Panichas, Dostoevsky has found a critic who accepts him on his own metaphysical terms. Emphasizing Dostoevsky's religious commitment hardly means discovering a cheerfully pious "message" in his daunting and profoundly disturbing books. As he traces the torturous path through the major novels—*Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Devils*, *A Raw Youth*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* —Panichas shows us a writer whose artistic confrontation with modern disintegration and doubt is filled with anguish and perplexity. The creator of the satanic Nikolay Stavrogin and the skeptical Ivan Karamazov never muffled the frightening "rhythm of breakdown, of disconnection and separation, of cynicism and lostness" in his fiction. Yet the reader who descends with Dostoevsky into hell also ascends with him to ecstatic vision within a "radical view of absolutes" that is "religious but not necessarily orthodox." From Raskolnikov's proud broodings in his dingy St. Petersburg apartment to Alyosha's last "Hurrah!" after Ilusha's funeral, Dostoevsky guides the reader along a "road to faith . . . filled with treachery."

A work of "meditative criticism," *The Burden of Vision* brings into focus the religious convictions informing Dostoevsky's art, convictions now generally obscured by critics busy with semiotic analyses and Marxist critique. By insisting upon the fundamentally religious character of the novels, Panichas takes a stand against "the increasing attempts to make Dostoevsky into just another commodity for the consumption of Western readers and more grist for Western critics." And unlike the dryly Baconian exegeses that fill the professional journals, the deep erudition in these pages is alive with a sympathy and a sensitivity—at times even a passion —that bespeak a real sharing in the author's prophetic vision. As few works of criticism do, this is a book that deserves its place on the same shelf with the inspired fiction it examines. (BC) cc

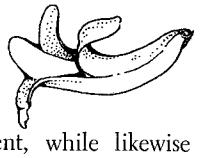
IN FOCUS

Iconoclast of the Center

by Michael A. Fumento

Charles Krauthammer: *Cutting Edges: Making Sense of the Eighties*; Random House; New York.

The New Republic claims with some pride to be schizophrenic: it infuriates both the right and the left, while claiming subscribers from the elite of both wings. It has published one of the most damning articles yet on the Sandinista



government, while likewise exposing the atrocities of the *Contras*. And what other magazine offers both the amusement of seeing Congressman Stephen Solarz twist reality, logic, and his own radical principles *and* the delight of watching Charles Krauthammer marshal fact and reason in his thoughtful analyses of domestic and foreign affairs?

As Krauthammer's first collection of essays, *Cutting Edges* constitutes a career landmark. A senior editor at *The*

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New Republic, before that a speech writer for Walter Mondale during the 1980 campaign, and before that a psychiatrist, Krauthammer considers himself an old-style Democrat, the kind that told Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you" instead of "What can I promise to you today?" In short, Krauthammer is neither a liberal nor a conservative but a kind of reactionary whose essays contain a mixture of hopefulness for the future and pining for the days when America was pledged to "bear any burden" in defense of freedom and when poverty seemed as capable of eradication as smallpox.

Yet Krauthammer apparently survived the collapse of Camelot with his wit and sense of humor intact. In a piece entitled "Stretch Marx" he recommends *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* for those who missed out on limited editions of *Pumping Iron With Engels* or *In Sneakers: Michael Harrington Speaks Out*. Similarly, he punctures the pompous use of "Marxists" as a euphemism for those whom we once called communists: "One imagines the [Salvadoran] guerrillas sitting around the campfire in their mountain redoubt reading *Das Kapital*." Neither comparable worth, the nuclear freeze, the "New Ideas" fad, nor the Sandinistaphiles command much more reverence in his essays.

Humor is ingratiating, and no doubt Krauthammer, like *The New Republic*, wants to appeal to as broad a spectrum of readers as possible. He bashes the right less frequently than does George Will and often tries to sympathize with the intentions of the left, even though the left bears the brunt of his criticisms far more often. Usually Krauthammer defends his centrist position successfully —but not always. His essay on abortion refutes both Geraldine Ferraro's and Mario Cuomo's public stands on abortion by showing that at the very least doctrinal consistency requires an earnest effort to persuade others to oppose the evil of abortion. But then Krauthammer muddles the issue by invoking John Courtney Murray's theory of the civil peace: "So many [Americans] believe—however wrongly—[abortion] to be a *right*, that even if one could muster a majority to ban abortion, that would constitute a grave violation of the civil peace, which both supports and is itself supported by religious pluralism." Who can accept the argument that abortion is murder but we must allow it anyway? More disturbing, Krauthammer never explains what moral calculus makes the mass extermination of human beings less horrible than "disturbing the civil peace."

But with few other exceptions, Krauthammer's arguments do appeal to both sides on the issues he covers. In his heart, Krauthammer wants to revive the old center of the Democratic Party, a combination of welfare-state compassion and cold-war willingness to bear the burden of being the leader and guardian of the free world. But (as he admits), that part of the party died the same day as Senator Henry Jackson. Nor, to judge by the Democratic frontrunners in the 1988 race, is there hope for its immediate resurrection. Perhaps it is some consolation that in a party without credible leadership, at least one writer remains to testify of a betrayed heritage. cc

Michael Fumento is the founding editor of Illini Review *at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.*

Trouble in Paradise

At the Dawn of Tyranny: The Origins of Individualism, Political Oppression, and the State **by Eli Sagan, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.**

The origin and nature of the state has been at the heart of political theory from the time of Plato and Aristotle. While speculations about man's primal innocence in a state of nature cannot be taken seriously as science, they continue to influence political propaganda. Liberal philosophers like Rawls and Nozick continue to write about man's natural equality or our natural rights as if they could actually see them lying on the dewy earth of Eden, waiting to be picked up by our "general mother" (and father). And some Marxists of more than ordinary credulity still write about the origin of private property and the oppressive state in language that would have warmed the heart of Friedrich Engels. Despite certain differences, Eli Sagan clearly fits the Engels mold.

In Sagan's view, the state is by its very nature oppressive. In what purports to be a study in comparative ethnology, he surveys the rise of the state among the Baganda of Africa and on the islands of Tonga, Tahiti, and the Hawaiian chain. His central thesis, derived from lucid books of Elman Service, is unimpeachable: the state represents a break from the most primitive level of social organization in which

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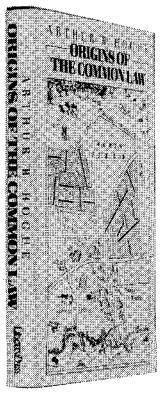

ORIGINS OF THE COMMON LAW

By Arthur R. Hogue

First published in 1966, *Origins of the Common Law* looks at the medieval roots of our legal system during the early formative period of the common law. Between 1154 and 1307, common law experienced a spectacular growth as a legal system enforced in the English Royal Courts. In the form of writs, judicial decisions, treatises, royal ordinances, and parliamentary statutes, the common law, emerged into explicit written form and formal procedure.

Hogue concludes, "The rule of law, the development of law by means of judicial precedents, the use of the jury to determine the material facts of a case, and the definition of numerous causes of action—these form the principal and valuable legacy of the medieval law to the modern law."

Not a technical legal treatise, this work should be of interest to the general reader and the specialist alike.

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kinship and politics are almost synonymous. Along the way, he makes a number of useful observations—none of them particularly original: architects of the state are often concerned with breaking up family unity and tend to behave like the tyrants described by Herodotus: they make themselves rich and commit sexual outrages. In addition, the narratives of native politicians make for interesting reading. On balance, however, the work does more harm than good.

Many of the sins are of omission. Sagan thinks, for example, that kinship is natural but the urge for power is not. In neither case does he display the least familiarity with the swelling literature on the biological basis for kinship—no mention of the contributions of Trivers, Hamilton, Fox, *et al.* Worse, his assumption that man is by nature a friendly, egalitarian creature needs at least some proof in an age when books are written describing the human species as innately aggressive, territorial, and hierarchical.

Sagan's indifference to evidence extends to his discussion of native cultures. It is clear that the Hawaiian state is a secondary formation, made possible by the arrival of Europeans and European firearms. In Buganda the situation is less clear-cut, but the very fact that there were European witnesses gives at least some indication that the rapid growth of the Bugandan state was not entirely a homegrown affair. What he does find time to discuss, however, are the entirely irrelevant speculations of Sigmund and Anna Freud. Throw in a plea for the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti, diatribes against capitalism, a subjective narrative style that would be out of place even in a novel (the text is peppered with "we may assume" and "surely" and "probably"), and the result is a stellar piece of political pornography with no redeeming social value. (TF) cc

"What man would be consoled at the loss of an arm by the knowledge that he could buy his shirts 40 percent cheaper?"

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL INTEREST TRADE POLICY

DR. JOHN M. CULBERTSON, Professor of Economics at the University of Wisconsin, argues that "'Balanced, mutually advantageous trade between nations' is the valid goal that must replace the false goal of 'free trade.'"

PROFESSOR WILLIAM R. HAWKINS argues the conservative case for a selectively mercantilist trade policy aimed at protecting strategic/basic industries.

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UNITED STATES INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Refuting the Planners

by Tommy W. Rogers

***Competing Visions: The Political Conflict Over America's Economic Future* by Richard McKenzie, Washington, DC: CATO Institute, $8.95.**

Richard McKenzie, a member of the economics department of Clemson University, here assesses the probable impact of new government regulation of the economy under what politicians like to call "National Industrial Policy" (NIP). He sets forth the major legislative policy proposals promoted under this rubric, and he examines their probable effect upon international trade, capital taxation, and central planning. Citing hard empirical data, McKenzie explodes the hoax of deindustrialization, the mythology of the displaced worker, and the ideology of employee "rights." Though advocated as a fresh new idea, McKenzie finds that the basic NIP doctrines are "at least as old as the eighteenth century's mercantilism and as familiar as this century's disastrous experiments with central planning, the corporate state, and five-year plans." He warns that more government involvement in the economy would mean more politically arbitrary decisions made in Washington, more wasted resources, and ultimately a poorer society.

The noble concerns voiced by NIP champions do nothing to redeem their implausible arguments with Professor McKenzie, who finds them replete with internal contradictions that "draw into question the movement's intellectual foundation." Further, NIP's backers either fail to realize or choose to ignore the fact that government control of workers, businessmen, and consumers "ultimately translates into the control of people, whether the control is instituted by democratic or by authoritarian means."

The author maintains that centralized planning "is bound to fail to produce what people want because it cannot obtain the information needed to make those calculations without the market it seeks to supplant." Further, plant-closing laws and trade restrictions would not protect American jobs, nor would National Industrial Policy make U.S. companies more competitive internationally. McKenzie illustrates how protectionism invariably becomes corporate welfare by pointing out how auto executives received enormous bonuses (ranging into the millions of dollars) in 1984 at a time when the Federal government was forcing the Japanese to withhold, "voluntarily," its cars from American markets.

The overriding objective of McKenzie's analysis is to redirect policy discussion toward ways to free the market from political control and interference. In his "Alternative Vision of Our Economic Future," McKenzie makes a strong case against government-managed capitalism. Too few Americans understand that many of our current economic problems have been caused by the breakdown of constitutional constraints on government. If our national economic future is to be prosperous and free, we must heed McKenzie's warning as we retrace the steps we have already taken toward managed markets and the interventionist state. cc

Tommy Rogers is a sociologist who writes from Jackson, MS.

True Grit

Jon Tuska: *The American West in Film: Critical Approaches to the Western*; Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.

Tuska's thesis is that Westerns are not attempts to portray the old West with documentary fidelity, nor do they merely reflect the attitudes of the American public. They are the creation of directors and producers, great and insignificant, men indifferent to historical accuracy and full of their own insights and biases. Furthermore, these insights and biases rarely reflect the attitudes of the *bienpensant* liberal. This book will

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be a real eye-opener for the middle-class freshman returning to her suburban home from her first term at Sarah Lawrence, aghast at the revelation that her parents are—bourgeois. As for me, I am going to see *The Searchers* again. (ECK) cc

Bridge Out

by Joseph Schwartz

The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period by Gorham Munson, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, $19.95.

Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of "The Bridge" by Edward J. Brunner, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, $22.95.

It is impossible to read Gorham Munson's *The Awakening Twenties* without thinking of Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return*, since both are memoir-histories of the 20's. Munson, however, is concerned only with 1913-1924.

> "America will never be the same." So opined the New York *Globe* after the official opening of the 1913 Armory Show. . . . In an unspecific way, the book ends with the remarkably pregnant situation of 1924, a historical moment unusually rich in possibilities of renascent achievement.

Although Munson and Cowley had known some of the same writers and had even worked together, they did not much like each other. *Exile's Return* has come to be an indispensable record of the period. Munson's work consists of 16 freely related essays, nine of which have been previously published. Some are on general topics ("Greenwich Village That Was"); some are concerned with individual writers ("Waldo Frank, Herald of the Twenties"). They have the value that comes from being written by an eyewitness, although Munson's claim that he participated in the making of the 20's must be regarded as a very modest one at best. The major difference between Cowley and Munson can be measured by their essays on Hart Crane, well-known to both of them.

In a few pages Cowley draws a warm picture of "the Roaring Boy . . . more lost and driven than the others," a picture full of insight about Crane because of the few selective details so carefully chosen. Munson's is a plodding account even though it is an "untold story."

That Munson was a close friend of Crane "during the best years of his life" (1919-1925) was his luckiest literary encounter. It guaranteed him a secure place in the decade, more so than his founding of the short-lived *Secession* or his book on Waldo Frank. Munson introduced Crane to Frank, who became one of the most powerful influences on him. Crane came to see the "symbolic possibilities" of *The Bridge* connected "directly with Whitman" through Frank. All considerations of the composition of that poem must begin with this fact. Agreeing with the common consensus that the poem is an intellectual failure, Munson offers this "untold story" to explain its failure.

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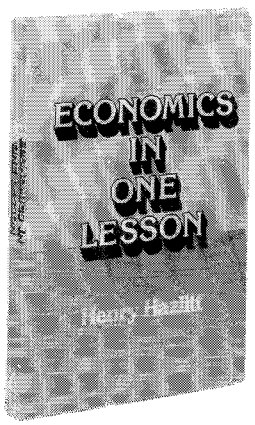
ECONOMICS IN ONE LESSON



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Crane had been given the wonderful opportunity to become part of a school, to have direct contact with a master—George Ivanovitch Gurdjiieff, the Russian/Parisian guru. "He turned back from Gurdjiieff, and his life was arrested at that point." Munson admits that this strange story will never be convincing "with the whole truth hidden from Crane and his friends." That being the case, how does the informed reader respond? Crane was Frank's disciple at the time, and Frank had a violent negative reaction to Gurdjiieff. The solid evidence we have is a letter of Crane to Yvor Winters which is clearly scornful about Munson and others rushing into the portals of this new Institute. This curious explanation for the failure of *The Bridge*, however, is no more esoteric than that offered by Edward J. Brunner in *Splendid Failure*.

Brunner's "untold story" is a previously "hidden" Hart Crane to explain the "splendid failure" of *The Bridge*. He needed "to overcome his doubt that he lacked a worthy audience" for his poetry. He somehow found this confidence in the summer of 1926 when in a burst of creativity he composed six of the poems and revised one. But the proof offered is strange: it is Crane's letter of June 20th, 1926, to Waldo Frank, a mixture of sarcasm and despair explaining how the modern America he wishes to celebrate is unworthy of its past, and, further, how Whitman's confidence in the people turned out to be ineffectual. In some convoluted fashion, Brunner takes this to mean that Crane discovered "that this desire for a clear-cut, dynamic affirmation is precisely what he shares with the multitudes." This, by the way, is the principle method of the book—a series of guesses as to what Crane intended. Despite the misleading title, Brunner attempts an assessment of Crane's work in general, not just *The Bridge*, although he omits any systematic study of *White Buildings*. But his volume contributes nothing significant to the criticism and scholarship about Hart Crane.

For a clearer perception of Crane's failure in *The Bridge*, we may turn to Crane's own letters and the many accounts of his conversation with friends. Few poets were more explicit, when he could be, than Crane. He was his own first critic, and one of the best.

The failure of *The Bridge* (a splendid poem) was that Crane did not know enough and that he never defined a center for it. It began as a visionary poem celebrating the beautiful: then under Waldo Frank's tutelage Crane tried to turn it into a hymn to Whitman. But Crane was never comfortable with that shift. In 1926 he read Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. He wrote Frank that this "stupendous" book acted as a negative catalyst, forcing him to find a positive center of action. Spengler was surely a catalyst, as a study of the six 1926 poems easily reveals, but not, I think, a negative one. The 1926 poems rise out of a past that overwhelms the present with its worth: no real links are forged between this past and the hopeless present. The paradox is that Spengler inspired, willy-nilly, the most elegantly fashioned parts of the poem. The sections written in 1929 were so embarrassing because in them Crane tried finally to force Frank's cosmic Whitmanism into them, and it just didn't work. cc

Joseph Schwartz is professor of English at Marquette University and author of Hart Crane: A Critical Bibliography.

Parent Abuse

John W. Whitehead: *Parents' Rights*; Crossway Books; Westchester, IL.

As tales of child abuse are screamed out on the nightly news, pressures mount for a national policy. Adolescent children are taken away from parents who appear "too strict," and state after state have passed laws on child abuse that include vague provisions for "mental health." Parents are beginning to wonder exactly where they stand. John Whitehead has done a good job of putting the news stories together with the legal evidence into a book that parents would do well to read.

While eminently useful as a popular tract, *Parents' Rights* is not exactly a work of scholarship. This would be no great problem if Whitehead had not been taken into the popular fantasies of Alvin Toffler and Phillipe Ariès. With statistical legerdemain Toffler portrays an America in which only 7 percent of the population lives in traditional families. Toffler must live in a strange neighborhood. Of course, a large part of the population is single, some are divorced, many mothers work (mostly part-time) but the doomsayers are absolutely ludicrous. More seriously, Whitehead endorses the common misconception that natural parents are, by and large, responsible for most child abuse. On the contrary, most recent studies indicate that it is stepparents, not natural parents—exactly what could be predicted from evolutionary biology.

Whitehead seems to regard the nuclear family as a fragile creation of modern times and duly cites Ariès' theory that childhood was "invented" sometime after the Renaissance and retails the usual horror stories of ancient infanticide. In fact, human beings, especially women, are programmed to establish families and rear children. There is a variety of family types, although most people in the world grow up in a household where women cook, clean, and sew, and men go out to work and bear the principal authority. Since children represent a kind of genetic immortality, parents are always concerned about their welfare, even though economic circumstances might drive some societies into practicing a selective infanticide on certain newborns. In general, however, parental affection and responsibility are the rule—not the exception.

The trouble with Whitehead's well-intentioned horror stories is that they cry out for equally well-intentioned legislation, which will have the effect of discouraging parental responsibilities. Families need to be reempowered, which will never take place as long as family advocates accept the erroneous arguments of those who would destroy the traditional family or make it an agent of the state. cc

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ART

Treasures From Spain

by Caroline Morgan

In an extraordinary gesture of international goodwill, the Spanish Ministry of Culture this past fall selected the rarest books and manuscripts from Spanish libraries for an exhibition at the New York Public Library. Items on display ranged from a 13th-century manuscript on the game of chess to exuberant prints by Joan Miró. Libraries from all parts of Spain contributed material, with the majority of pieces coming from the National Library, the Royal Palace, and the Escorial Monastery just outside Madrid.

"Treasures From Spain: Ten Centuries of Spanish Books," with 200 works on display, created a living awareness of the various cultures that determined the destiny of Spain. The exhibit exemplified Jorge Luis Borges' description—cited in the exhibition catalog—of books as "the best memory of our species."

For the 10 centuries spanned by the show, Spain has developed as a cultural melting pot, much like America. Nothing but the Catholic Church united the diverse cultures of the Iberian peninsula, and that unification did not occur until the end of the 15th century. Even the religious impulse has expressed itself in diverse ways, as may be seen by comparing the early manuscripts that surround the liturgical text with fiendish Flemish devils with other manuscripts illustrated with the soft, sweet colors of Italianate birds and flowers or with the classical architectural contours borrowed from French artists.

While Flemish, French, and Italian influences dominated Spanish art and literature during the Renaissance, medieval Spain conceded superiority in scientific and scholarly matters to the Muslims and Jews, especially in the great school of translators in Toledo. The intricate Mudejar ornamentation of manuscripts in the exhibition reflected the legacy of that culture in decorative arts throughout the southern provinces.

"Treasures From Spain" included the spectacular 13th-century illuminated manuscript entitled *Cantigas de Santa María*, a collection of Galician-Portuguese lyrical poetry representing the most important poetic genre of

Portrait of Ippolita Maria, placed within the initial letter "A" which begins the codex of Virgil's Aeneid. *Fifteenth-century Italian. Photo courtesy The New York Public Library.*

medieval Spain. The *Cantigas* manuscript is most famous for its miniature paintings. Besides providing precious information on costume and architecture of the period, these masterpieces reveal an era in Spanish culture when Arabic, Jewish, and Christian individuals lived and indeed flourished together.

"Treasures From Spain" transcended the limitations of any one cultural influence to express the visionary potential of what the Spanish Minister of Culture has termed the "long search for certainty" in the human spirit. After centuries of pursuing that search under monarchy, Spaniards may now continue it with the new freedom of democracy.

Ironically, no such collection of Spanish books and manuscripts has ever been shown in Spain. Popular response to the exhibition in New York has persuaded the Spanish government to reassemble the show in Madrid. Spaniards themselves might then explore the value of these treasures and restore them to their own collective memory. cc

Caroline Morgan is a drama and art critic in New York City.

Karl Bodmer's America

by Shehbaz H. Safrani

To see America through the paintings of Karl Bodmer (1809-93) is a rare experience. Last summer and fall, thousands of Americans shared in this experience by visiting an exhibition of Bodmer's works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The exhibition, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the 1832-34 North American expedition of Bodmer and the German naturalist Prince Maximilian (1782-1867), featured 109 of Bodmer's watercolors and prints. One volume of Maximilian's diary on display focused on the pair's historic expedition across the Ohio frontier and up the Missouri River into the Indian wilderness of the Louisiana Purchase.

This entire exhibition comes from an infinitely larger and historically significant Maximilian-Bodmer Collection consisting of 427 watercolors and sketches, as well as original diaries, journals, aquatints, and correspondence from the journey of 1832-34. Prominent historians have called the

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collection, acquired in 1962 by InterNorth, Inc., a national treasure. "The Bodmer watercolors are unique in that so many highly accomplished works have survived by one artist," observes Henry Flood Robert Jr., director of the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, where this collection will be on permanent loan.

Bodmer's paintings are as visually appealing as Tocqueville's words are intellectually provocative. Bodmer portrays a passing stage in American history, when the vast new frontier of the West lay almost untouched, in a style suggestive of the Hudson River school of painting. However, Bodmer hardly romanticized. He recorded with skill and diligence all that he observed.

While others had preceded Bodmer and Maximilian into the wilderness of the Louisiana Purchase, their journey (beginning in the spring of 1832 and concluding in August of 1834) is still one of the most important of the early expeditions. None of their predecessors were experienced naturalists like Maximilian or skilled illustrators like Bodmer. Bodmer's watercolors and prints were the first accurate portrayals of the far western Indians to reach the public, and they were primary accounts of what soon became virtually lost cultures.

Prince Maximilian Alexander Philipp zu Weid-Neuweid first gained renown for his explorations of the Brazilian rain forest between 1815-17. In 1832 Maximilian asked Bodmer—at 23 already recognized as a versatile Swiss artist and a fine draftsman—to accompany him on another expedition, this time to North America, where he hoped to examine and collect the native plants, animals, and Indian artifacts.

Both men were keen observers. Maximilian kept meticulous notes in his journals while Bodmer sketched and painted. Many of Bodmer's renderings are so precise that landmarks painted more than a century and a half ago can still be identified. (Canaletto's paintings, we may recall, served in reconstructing some of the most beautiful buildings destroyed during World War II.) Bodmer painted hundreds of watercolors, vividly preserving the same landscape, wildlife, frontier settlements, Indian villages, and people that Maximilian described in his journals. Working from a different perception of nature, Albert Bierstadt spent a mere three days visiting the Grand Canyon and then painted a large-scale painting of it entirely in his studio. The result is a breathtaking canvas, now found at the Brooklyn Museum, but we still may think of Dryden's comment, "Bombast is commonly the delight of that audience which loves Poetry, but understands it not."

Kiäsax (Bear on the Left), Piegan Blackfeet Man. Watercolor on paper. Photo courtesy the InterNorth Art Foundation, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha.

None of Bodmer's works can compare in scale to Bierstadt's picture of the Grand Canyon, but together they provide us with a remarkably detailed pictorial rendering of mid-19th century America on the frontier. His landscapes and paintings of Indians are valuable for another reason, since they give us a second glimpse into regions made famous by Audubon.

Bodmer was self-confident, but life on the trail was not easy for him. Not only was he expected to paint, but he also had to hunt and perform other chores for the prince. In Pennsylvania, his hand was severely injured when a rifle misfired. During the bitter winter of 1833-34 his paints often froze. He frequently had to live in cramped, filthy quarters, surviving on food that was as unappetizing and monotonous as it was unnourishing. Many Indians, for reasons which struck the Europeans as superstitious, were reluctant to be portrayed. Occasionally an Indian who was the subject of Bodmer's painting would object that the artist had portrayed him unflatteringly. Yet some of the Mandans took lessons in art from Bodmer while he was camped at Fort Clark.

Following his return to Europe, Bodmer moved to Paris to supervise preparation of the engraving plates of the paintings selected by Maximilian to illustrate his book *Travels in the Interior of North America in 1832-34*. In all, 81 hand-colored aquatints were reproduced in an atlas to supplement Maximilian's text.

Bodmer had counted on making money from this publication. But in spite of efforts to promote its sale, the book sold poorly. At one point, Bodmer made personal appearances with the King of France and other celebrities to help stimulate purchases. Even that did little good. Embittered by this experience, Bodmer later complained that he had wasted the most productive years of his life on North American themes. He seemed unaware of just how important his work was to an understanding and appreciation of the American Western Frontier. Perhaps understandably, Karl Bodmer lost interest in traveling to distant lands. He turned down an opportunity to accompany Prince Maximilian once more, in a journey to Russia, and later he rejected an offer to accompany a French archaeological expedition to Egypt. Ironically, although Bodmer is remembered as one of the finest portraitists of the American Indian, in his later years he never painted a human figure again. His later interests focused exclusively on forest and animal scenes, many of them overly sentimental.

After the end of his involvement with the publication of Maximilian's book, Bodmer gradually began to establish an independent reputation of his own. During the 1850's, he settled permanently outside Paris and became a respected member of the Barbizon school of painting, had several successful shows at the Paris Salon, and regularly contributed engravings to a number of illustrated magazines. He died in 1893.

Prince Maximilian kept many of Bodmer's original watercolors and

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sketches (as well as his own journals, diaries, and other materials collected on the North American expedition) in the family castle near Koblenz, where they remained undisturbed until being discovered following World War II. cc

Shehbaz H. Safrani is a writer and painter based in New York.

STAGE

Beware the Limelight

by David Kaufman

"Who can keep up with anything these days?"

—Denis Donoghue,
The New Republic, 3/10/86

"If a National Theater is to be in only one city, it should, of course, be in New York, the center of the country's cultural life and the fount of its theatrical traditions. That's where the acting and directing talent would most naturally gravitate."

—Benedict Nightingale,
Fifth Row Center

Despite the bad press it receives both nationally and locally, New York theater is not as comatose or as bankrupt as many now suppose. What has been its greatest asset historically, its spectacular abundance, remains its chief characteristic today. Despite the perennial prophecies of doom and the sort of wistful nostalgia that informs our contemporary viewpoint regardless of topic, New York continues to be the theater capital of the country, if not the world.

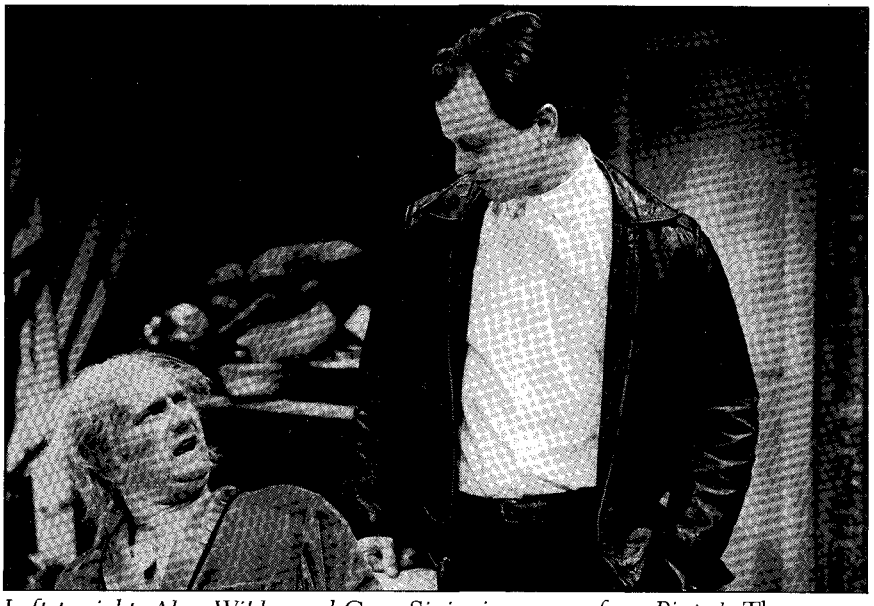
The false impression has to do with that loaded and jaded label, "Broadway," and the notion that Broadway is synonymous with New York theater. Such an attitude remains as provincial as it ever was, and as far from an accurate portrayal of what constitutes theater in New York as it has been since the 30's or 40's, when the Off-Broadway venue began to expand more or less in proportion with Broadway's ever-diminishing output. The reasons for the attitude are complicated. But what amounts to little more than a reactionary response has been all too readily seized upon by the big-time financiers and Broadway franchisers who bemoan their losses on three or four investments even while they recoup those losses on a single "hit."

It is, after all, ludicrous to suggest that Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Minneapolis, Seattle, Houston, Louisville, New Haven, Philadelphia, or Washington, DC, with their one or two or three noteworthy theater companies apiece, can even begin to compete with the vast scope of New York theater. New York has, to name only the more prominent companies, The Ensemble Studio Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Roundabout Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, the WPA, the Circle Rep, the Hudson Guild, the American Place, the Second Stage, The Production Company, Mirror Repertory Theatre, The Music-Theatre Group/Lenox Arts Center, La Mama, Theatre for the New City, Vineyard Theater, BAM, Theater of the Open Eye, and perhaps the most significant of all, Joe Papp's Public Theater, which alone houses numerous stages and annually introduces more than twice as many productions as, say, the Goodman or the Guthrie or the American Repertory Theatre.

Each of these companies behaves like the more celebrated regional theater companies throughout the country, and a number of them even provide the repertory situations for which the more vociferous critics of American theater apparently pine. Last year even introduced the first of what may become an annual event, unique to New York: the American Theater Exchange, a consortium of productions from American regional theater. (The first season included *Faulkner's Bicycle* from the Yale Repertory Theatre, *Season's Greetings* from the Alley Theatre of Houston, and *In the Belly of the Beast* from the Mark Taper Forum in LA.)

During the 365 days in 1985, I managed to attend 144 different plays and musicals on that narrow spot of land between the Hudson and the East Rivers; and I have no way of knowing how many such events I missed in the same area. Of course, I could tell you how many shows opened on Broadway during the 1984-85 theatrical season —31—and I could add that it was five fewer than arrived on Broadway during the preceding season, and 19 fewer than the 1982-83 season. But the Off-Broadway circuit seemed to swell simultaneously—and in more than just quantifiable ways. And that far more nebulous region which has naturally come to be known as Off-Off-Broadway behaved very much like the cosmos—i.e., in both observable and mysterious ways.

Many claim that the greatest tragedy in American drama is that there is none. Part of the mandate which crit-



Left to right: Alan Wilder and Gary Sinise in a scene from Pinter's The Caretaker. *Photo by Brigitte Lacombe.*

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ics have stipulated for the regional movement is to fill that gap, to foster an O'Neill, a Williams, a Miller. While pleading for government subsidies, its representatives compare the promise of regional theater to a garden, providing the soil conducive to nurturing theatrical talent and to generating the hybrid genius of tomorrow. But aside from Lanford Wilson (the Circle Rep in New York), and to a lesser degree David Mamet (the Goodman in Chicago), what company has cultivated a dramatist without then losing him to the more diffuse theater world at large? Most move on to larger and greener pastures—usually South of Central Park—soon after the blossom appears.

Even the Chicago-based Steppenwolf, surely the hottest theater company today (though it has yet to advance the career of a writer as it has propelled the reputations of numerous performers and directors), brings to New York as much as it possibly can: *True West, and a Nightingale Sang . . . , Balm in Gilead, Orphans, Arms and the Man, The Caretaker,* since 1982. But at what price? Already one hears reports of internal erosion of the spirit and the allegiance of the group. And what will become of the Goodman remains anyone's guess, now that Gregory Mosher has assumed responsibility for the Lincoln Center Theater and commenced his programming there with two modest one-acts by his long-time colleague David Mamet.

Terrence McNally in his satire on all things theatrical, *It's Only a Play,* summarizes regional theater as "plays that couldn't get produced in New York, performed by actors who couldn't get jobs in New York, for people who wished they still lived in New York." That is hardly a fair judgment, and yet it is still evident that the regional theater movement has not substantially disturbed New York's position as the apex of theatrical accomplishment. Though regionalism has gained noticeable attention in recent years, there is a grave irony in the realization that the aesthetic impulse behind this movement has been obfuscated if not obliterated by the political double-talk and the chauvinistic debate that ensues on *both* sides of the Hudson River. For all the advances in the regional movement, American theater has become *less*, and not more, American, inasmuch as it has become more fragmented than ever before with so many centralized factions competing against each other as well as against the pinnacle they still aspire to.

Actually, regionalism is alive and well inside New York. For all intents and purposes, Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village, for example, is no closer to the Great White Way than is the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, or the Goodman in Chicago, or the Yale Rep in New Haven, or the Actor's Theater in Louisville. In recent years, these theaters respectively have exported to Broadway: *Angels Fall* and *As Is, 'night, Mother* and *Big River, Glengarry Glen Ross, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* and—via the Manhattan Theatre Club—*Crimes of the Heart,* to name only those that come quickly to mind. Does the now 15-year-old plea for government subsidy of regional theater really arise out of an ambition to improve the quality of our theater in general, or is it merely a manifestation of geographic pride? Of course, when it is a question of "money for nothing," who needs a reason?

I offer all this as long-winded preface to a discussion of Steppenwolf's recent production of *The Caretaker,* imported to Broadway's Circle in the Square Theatre direct from its Chicago-based home. Having praised Steppenwolf's output until now, the New York critics have come down too hard on this no-nonsense version of the Pinter play. It is as if the keepers of the keys to New York theater have finally awakened to the noise of a war being waged—a war in which geographical, rather than aesthetic, battles occupy the front lines. In this particular skirmish, the New York critics have overlooked some of the finer aspects of Steppenwolf's *Caretaker* in their unspoken need to debunk the myth that Steppenwolf is the *only* exciting theater company—a myth they helped to create.

The Caretaker is not only Pinter's most frequently produced play, but also his most controversial. When it was new in 1960, Clifford Leech wrote that it "seems now to be the most impressive dramatic writing in English since the war, but we cannot know if Pinter will go beyond it, we cannot know how even this play will look if there is a future from which it may be regarded."

But rather than say anything about the play itself (is it too sacred at this point, or too mundane a topic?) under John Malkovich's straightforward direction, the critics have seized the event as an opportunity to dump on Steppenwolf. Welcome to the harsh glare of the limelight, John Malkovich and Gary Sinise. Be advised in the future to keep your grubby little hands off all material sacred and British. (Indeed, Malkovich's last outing with a British work, Shaw's *Arms and the Man,* also for the Circle in the Square, was given a lukewarm to poor reception.)

"This *Caretaker* is a giggly, sloppy reading of the play that dissipates its potentially absorbing drama," bemoaned Frank Rich. Clive Barnes agreed: "The director, Mr. Malkovich, and his quite talented actors, seemed unable to let the play speak for itself, creak for itself. Less would have been more. . . . Such balance, and such overtones, never emerge from a production that is disappointingly and doggedly provincial." Even the usually demure Douglas Watt found Steppenwolf "turning Harold Pinter's early 'comedy of menace' into something more like a comedy of discombobulation." But the greatest venom comes, characteristically, from John Simon, who opens his review by saying, "Not even a dog, not even a dog of a play by Harold Pinter, should be treated as the Steppenwolf Theatre Company is kicking around *The Caretaker.*"

All of this is a far cry from the reaction to the first production, which Kenneth Tynan used as an occasion to advance Pinter's career: "What holds one, theatrically, is Mr. Pinter's bizarre use (some would call it abuse) of dramatic technique, his skill in evoking atmosphere, and his encyclopaedic command of contemporary idiom. . . . Where most playwrights devote their technical efforts to making us wonder what will happen *next,* Mr. Pinter forces our wonder on what is happening *now.* Who are these people? How did they meet, and why? Mr. Pinter delays these disclosures until the last tenable moment; he teases us without boring us, which is quite a rare achievement."

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But the critical response to the present version is based on previous experience with the work. I am forced to admit I have not seen *The Caretaker* on the stage before. But that was a kind of advantage. The full effect of a Pinter play—and particularly this one—relies on the freshness. For the audience, ignorance is primarily responsible for the menace and the ambiguity that typify Pinter's work. In fact, Pinter's principal contribution to the drama is not his celebrated *pause* (which inevitably fails to refresh), but his refusal to provide exposition as the theater had known it for 2,500 years—in short, his sadistic treatment of the audience. The menace for which he is famous stems primarily from his keeping the audience in the dark.

Before Pinter, when the curtain went up, the playwright immediately went about his business of establishing the context and supplying the background. Pinter recognized the great value of the audience's implicit trust. He realized what was always there—the audience's sheer lack of understanding what it wasn't told, its total dependence on the playwright—and by deliberately failing to fill in the gaps, he turned that situation to his advantage. His effectiveness as a dramatist lies in his ability to hold our attention in an absolute vacuum of exposition. Unfortunately, the trick only works the first time, and much of Pinter is like a second-rate mystery—worthless once you know how it comes out. The taut and harrowing edge to the suspense is expended the first time around. (Ironically, *Betrayal*, which some consider Pinter's most stunning achievement, is merely an inversion of this method as he divulges an abundance of exposition but releases it *backwards*.)

Unwittingly or not, *The Caretaker* itself becomes a perfect microcosm of the effect Pinter has on us. It begins when Aston invites Davies, an aging vagabond he just met, home with him. Like Pinter, Aston is a laconic, vague figure, but he has guaranteed himself the upper hand. Like Davies, we become the unsuspecting guest he has welcomed into his parlor for the purpose of knocking us around a bit, though we never clearly understand why. Of course, the circumstance be-

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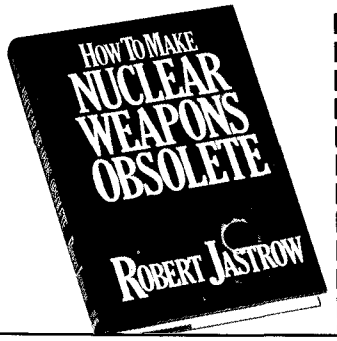

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comes far more complex than that. In this case, it's complicated by the introduction of Mick, Aston's even more mysterious brother who, in keeping with the analogy, can be viewed as an alternate representation of Pinter designed to complement Aston, sadistic when Aston is beneficent and soothing when Aston becomes sadistic.

If anything, the Steppenwolf rendering lends itself more to such an interpretation than earlier productions in which Davies was apparently a menacing figure himself. Here he is a dupe and a bumbler: like the audience, a proverbial sitting duck for the darker fluctuations of Aston and Mick's moods (which can be viewed as Pinter's relentless ambivalence). Actually, the Steppenwolf production seems even more sympathetic with Pinter's intentions, as revealed by his "original idea" before he finished the script "to end the play with the violent death" of Davies. From its very conception, Davies was seen as the victim in Pinter's eyes, Aston and Mick as the predators; and not the other way around.

We are also reminded of the Steppenwolf imprint as it was demonstrated recently by Lyle Kessler's *Orphans* and by Laurie Metcalf's overpowering, extended monologue in *Balm in Gilead*. An identical effect shows up here in Aston's famous speech at the close of Act II, when he reveals that years ago "they took me to a hospital, right outside of London" where "they used to come round with these . . . big pincers, with wires on, attached to a little machine."

As Aston, Jeff Perry emerges from his laconic gloom with just the right rhythm to do justice to this pivotal speech, locating the eloquence Pinter magically achieves with an otherwise hopelessly inarticulate character. In the role originated by Alan Bates, Gary Sinise (co-founder of Steppenwolf with Malkovich) sustains the gentleness offset by unexpected volatility, as appropriate to Mick. But it's Alan Wilder as Davies (originally performed by Donald Pleasance) who cackles and crackles his way through the three-act play, vacillating between fear and senility.

The attention devoted in recent years to a theatrical production's point of origin has often been at the expense of a fair assessment of the work itself. However else it might have been perceived, the Steppenwolf production of *The Caretaker* historically marks the end of the New York critics' honeymoon with Steppenwolf. Now that the battle lines have been clearly drawn, it will be interesting to see where Steppenwolf goes from here. cc

David Kaufman is a theater critic in New York City.

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter From Europe

by Harold O.J. Brown

A Manly Celibate

What the late Axel Springer (1912-1985) was to the world of newspaper publishing, legal scholar Jacques Ellul is to Protestants, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is to writers, the vigorous Père Raymond-Léopold Bruckberger is to the world of contemporary Roman Catholic intellectuals—a man whose many gifts would make him a sought-after celebrity if his deepest convictions were not so dramatically out-of-fashion. These four all have in common an ardent support for the traditional ideals of the Christian civilization of the West, a passion that renders them hopelessly suspect in the eyes of most Western journalists and of much of the ecclesiastical establishment as well.

Axel Springer, for example, was commonly decried as an archconservative. In fact, he supported the German Socialist Party (SPD) for years, until Willy Brandt, on becoming Federal Chancellor, took West Germany down the road of his new *Ostpolitik*, i.e., of accommodation to Soviet expansionism. Springer seems to have forfeited the right to the attention his publishing eminence and many charities ought to have merited, by virtue of his outspoken commitment to ideals that the opinion-makers have rejected: such intellectually disreputable causes as democracy, the Western alliance, German reunification, and reconciliation with Israel. And Springer's publicly declared conversion to evangelical Christianity in later life hardly improved his standing among opinion-makers. Although honored by the Israeli government as well as by Jewish organizations such as B'nai B'rith for his commitment to the state of Israel and to interfaith understanding, Springer never hesitated to state his conviction that the Jews mistakenly wait for the true Messiah who had already come: in other words, to affirm that Judaism remains incomplete without Jesus Christ. Springer was also bold enough to tell the oil-rich world of Islam that Allah, who has no son, cannot be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ.

Springer had the audacity to reaffirm the finality of Christianity—a claim that ought to be evident to all who know Christian teachings, regardless of whether they accept them or not. He did this at a time when many Protestant theologians and indeed the Pope himself seem bent on minimiz-

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ing the contrast between Christianity and the other great monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam.

Ellul, born in 1912, originally enjoyed considerable popularity in Protestant ecumenical circles, following World War II, in which he fought in the anti-German *Résistance*. His early popularity resembles that of the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in 1945 for plotting against Hitler. Unfortunately for his reputation in ecumenical circles, Ellul, unlike Bonhoeffer, survived the Nazi terror and went on —like Solzhenitsyn—to compare it almost favorably with the terrors of Communism, going so far as to say that the only moral difference between Communism and Nazism lies in the fact that the Communists won and the Nazis were crushed. If Hitler had won, Ellul claims, our Christian intellectuals would engage in "dialogues with Nazism," and the horrors of the Gulag rather than those of the Nazi Kazetts (KZ-*Konzentrationslager*, concentration camps) would be the staple fare of our news and entertainment media.

Like Ellul, Solzhenitsyn appears to have forfeited his claim to acceptability, and for similar reasons, for he not only continues to excoriate the malignancy of Communism, but also to deride American political and intellectual leaders for their lack of courage, honesty, and willpower (see Edward E. Ericson Jr.'s article, "Solzhenitsyn and Democracy," in the November 1985 *Chronicles*).

Although less famous than the other three, Father Bruckberger, born in 1907, has much in common with them—not the least the fact that he is perfectly willing to stand by unpopular convictions even when they cost him much of the celebrity that his achievement otherwise would merit—and he appears to have made similar mistakes. Although each of the four is deeply committed to the Christian faith (Springer a Lutheran, Ellul a Calvinist, Solzhenitsyn Russian Orthodox, and Bruckberger Roman Catholic), Bruckberger is the only clergyman among them—and also the only member of the Foreign Legion! In 1929 Bruckberger entered the Dominican order, the order known for producing not only the greatest of all Roman Catholic scholars, Thomas Aquinas, but also for taking a leading role in the Inquisition. Like each of the others, Bruckberger is difficult to pigeonhole, as readers may discover by acquiring his latest book, *Le Capitalisme—mais c'est la vie!* (Paris: Plon, 55 Fr). He is certainly not a typical representative of political, theological, or economic conservatism, but he professes a number of things that should endear him to conservatives as much as they make him odious to leftists.

For example, Bruckberger professes an admiration and love for the United States as well as a deep commitment to the historic role of France, even to France's role as a colonial power in Africa. Any one of these attitudes alone would ruin his standing in contemporary Catholic and Protestant intellectual circles, but—as if that were not enough—he professes a fine contempt for modern theology. "Les plus misérables d'entre nous sont ceux qui n'attendent rien et le proclament bien haut avec une sorte de satisfaction hautaine, comme un eunuque serait

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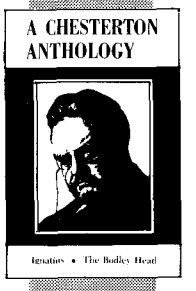

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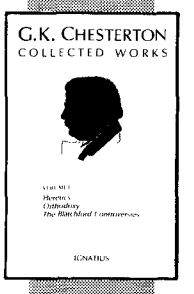

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fier d'être châtré" (The most miserable among us are those who expect nothing [from God] and who loudly proclaim it with a sort of haughty self-satisfaction, like a eunuch proud of being castrated). Needless to say, this sort of thing does not make one popular in trendy church circles, where the revolt against traditional clerical celibacy may be a sort of compensation for an increasingly evident spiritual impotence. Bruckberger's impressive record of accomplishments, including three films as well as a long list of books, is not enough to compensate for such eccentricities.

Bruckberger is perhaps the closest thing to a Crusader knight seen among Christians since the military orders went out of fashion in the Middle Ages. As a soldier he went through the debacle of the French army in 1940, and like Ellul he joined the *Résistance* —much to the dismay of his Dominican superiors, who did not want to rock the Nazi and Pétainist boat. Eventually he was named *Aumonier* (Chaplain) *de la Résistance*, a post for which I know no parallel elsewhere. In this capacity Bruckberger welcomed the victorious General Charles de Gaulle to the Cathedral of Notre-Dame on the liberation of Paris in August 1944. Although Bruckberger clearly respected de Gaulle, unlike de Gaulle he would continue to affirm *l'Algerie française* and would have fought to defend it.

Made a *chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, for his role in the *Résistance*, Bruckberger was obnoxious to his church superiors, an unpleasant reminder of their own compromises. As a consequence, he was virtually forced out of France by his monastic superiors in 1947.

At this point in Bruckberger's life, when he was a monk of 40 with years of fidelity to his vow of celibacy, he fell deeply in love with a young woman. Strangely enough for modern enlightened liberal thought, and unlike so many others who had also taken a vow of chastity, Bruckberger chose to renounce romance rather than his vow.

His "exile" from France took him first to North Africa, where his unusual loyalties, to the Church and to France, were rapidly becoming unfashionable. Between 1948 and 1950 he lived on a post of the French Foreign Legion, close to a community of Catholic medical missionaries known as *Soeurs blanches*—both of which highly different "orders" he praises as the true representatives of France—as well as of Christianity, at least in the case of the Sisters.

In an encounter that seems more reminiscent of the Crusader kingdoms of Outre-Mer than of modern Europe in the postcolonial era, Bruckberger once took it upon himself to defend "the honor of Christ" in an incident which is probably all but incomprehensible to late-20th-century Christians, although it was very well understood and admired by the Foreign Legion and earned him the status of an honorary legionnaire "first class." One of the most admired and best-loved of the medical missionaries, a Sister Agnes, mysteriously eloped with a Moslem businessman named Benpheljà, to the consternation and shame of the other Sisters, the rage of the Foreign Legion, and the amusement of the Moslem population. A "bride of Christ" had been "carried off" (even if without violence) by an unbeliever. The colonial authorities, militantly secular, saw nothing out of order, and the Church hierarchy preferred to keep a low profile.

Consequently Bruckberger took it upon himself to emerge from his Foreign Legion quarters and confront the Moslem bridegroom on his own. When the groom prudently persisted in avoiding him, Bruckberger went to the highest Moslem spiritual authority in the area, the *bachaga* of Aïn Sefra, accompanied by a highly embarrassed French administrator. What a French administrator could not understand, the *bachaga* understood very well. In a courtly *affaire d'honneur* evocative of a dialogue between Saladin and Richard Coeur de Lion, and to the astonishment of the civil authorities, the Moslem *bachaga* approved Bruckberger's mission and passed a sentence of exile on Benpheljà for an affront to the honor of the Christians' Lord.

Bruckberger contended that for a Christian, a determination to defend the honor of Christ is the only way to retain the respect of the honor-conscious Moslems. The French government was uncomprehending, but not the Foreign Legion. Legionnaires, unlike knights of the old military orders, certainly had not taken a vow of celibacy, but unlike many of the modern clergy, they still had a profound respect for those who did. While the civil and ecclesiastical authorities made plans to deal with this embarrassing Dominican, Bruckberger was given the rare honor of being made a *légionnaire d'honneur de première classe*—a highly unusual distinction for a clergyman. It is probably needless to add that Bruckberger was able to handle the mandatory "aperitif" at the dinner in his honor—a two-liter jug of strong red wine. The admiration of the Legion did not deter the Catholic hierarchy and the French colonial administration from joining hands to usher the new *légionnaire d'honneur* out of North Africa as rapidly as possible.

From North Africa, Bruckberger traveled to the United States, where he lived during the years 1950-1958. In North America he discovered a new cause, one that made him even more objectionable, if possible, to those who already found him a throwback to the Middle Ages: American capitalism, incarnated in Henry Ford. In the United States, he discovered that the true revolutionaries of our era were not Marx, Lenin, or Stalin, but the capitalist Henry Ford and the labor leader Samuel Gompers. Henry Ford, by his policy of paying hitherto unheard-of high wages, changed the status of industrial workers from proletarians to consumers, producing a greater social transformation than all the revolutions from the French to the Nicaraguan combined. Gompers was that highly unique "labor leader" who really respected workers and credited them with the intelligence and judgment to make their own decisions, rather than looking on them as mindless sheep to be led, by force if necessary, to utopian pastures. Gompers saw his role as the workers' executive in the original sense of the word, called to carry out their wishes, not to tell them what they had to wish. In *La République américaine* (1958, published in English translation as *Image of America* in 1965), Bruckberger, like de Toqueville a century earlier, recognized and honored distinctive American contributions in areas where Europeans are still inclined to think that they are the arbiters of fashion.

In 1958 Bruckberger still hoped that

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Algeria would remain French, arguing that this might be possible if France were willing to try an American experiment in her restive North African colony. What could be more shocking than for an intellectual to suggest that France ought to have kept her colonies? Only to propose that it might successfully and happily do so by introducing principles borrowed from *American* industry and labor relations! Even in 1980, long after anticolonialism had become an unquestioned dogma all over the world, provoking mandatory Western *mea culpas* whenever mentioned, Bruckberger still had the audacity to claim that France's engagement in Algeria and the Algerians' century of cooperation with France were honorable, a proud page in history. Although I have not come across any remarks by Bruckberger on the topic of South Africa, I suspect that while he would on the one hand be profoundly aware of the faults of South Africa and of the atrocity of apartheid, he would on the other hand consider it cruel as well as cowardly for the white government to yield to internal agitation and outside pressure, precisely because that would mean abandoning millions of Africans to revolutionary chaos, bloodshed, and totalitarian tyranny. Sentiments such as those Bruckberger expresses, as well as my own suggestion as to how he may think with respect to South Africa, dare hardly be thought, much less stated, in political, academic, or religious circles anywhere in the "Christian" West. In the political and economic realms as well as in church circles, the Western mind is dominated by the smug impotence so aptly characterized by Bruckberger: eunuchs proud of being castrated. This remarkable Dominican monk and honorary Foreign Legionnaire has shown that it is possible to be celibate without being emasculated—an admirable lesson in an age when so much of our intellectual world seems to be bent on demonstrating that it can be sexually promiscuous and "totally depraved" while remaining morally impotent, sexually sordid, and spiritually sterile. cc

Harold O.J. Brown is pastor of the Evangelische Kirchgemeinde in Klosters, Switzerland, and a contributing editor.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

The Bismarck Bypass

In their own quiet way, arts activities are as vigorous in the Midwest as anywhere else, a fact that few seem to realize—including Midwesterners.

A year ago I was privileged to escort an émigré lecturer around my state for a week. At one evening's talk he impetuously introduced me as "not one of your long-haired Greenwich Village poets" but one who "edits and publishes a famous poetry magazine." Now "famous" is a relative term, and my relatives have always been generous with their support, so what could I do but blush and signal to the man to get on with it?

After the lecture, a woman rushed up to me and breathlessly started in about poetry: how she'd written it since she was this high, had been published in some impressive places, had been *looking* for a magazine just like mine—and would I read some of her poems? "Glad to," I began, and had to stop her almost bodily from running off to her apartment to haul the trunk (apparently) back to me. Pleading with her to *mail* it—the deathless plea of all editors—I scribbled my box number on a scrap of paper.

She allowed me to lay the treasure in the palm of her hand—then *looked* at it and then up at me in polite but obvious dismay.

"Oh, you're not out of New York?" she asked this North Dakota native, affecting nonchalance.

"Nope. Bismarck," I affirmed, swelling with pride.

"Mmmmmmm. Neat," said she, backing away. Later I saw her crumple up something white and drop it into a *Ficus benjamina*.

* * *

I would rather live here than anywhere else, but we Midwesterners *are* sometimes disadvantaged, underprivileged, discriminated against. (Where *is* the Supreme Court when we need it?) Take arts grants: We don't get our share. Our state legislatures haven't enough of a population at their disposal to tax for large sums of money. And there just aren't many gay Hispanic left-handed Vietnam veterans publishing quarterly journals in this neck of the woods, so most Federal money goes to New York and Berkeley. I write this as a one-time recipient of $500

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from the Coordinating Council on Literary Magazines, which got the money from the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant came when my fledgling journal needed it most, and was unique in that even "for profit" publications were eligible. I was, and am, grateful. Still, when I look at the list of journals granted CCLM funds *this* year, I get the feeling that I'm just not kinky enough, that the CCLM banked on my journal's turning sharply, weirdly left, was disappointed, and has moved on to ideologically greener pastures.

And about profit: Technically my journal is a sole proprietorship, "for profit," so I can't apply for most grants. I pay tax on the journal's income, struggle from issue to issue, turn every cent back into the publication, and pay myself nothing. If I declared my journal a nonprofit corporation, I could *receive* tax money instead of relinquishing it; I would be eligible for more grants than I could count, and could pay myself a handsome salary if the right ones came through (a slender possibility: see above). The semantics involved here—"profit," "nonprofit"—have always puzzled me, but intelligent friends ask, "Why don't you quit carping and just *do* it?" Well, because my journal, and my own writing, are the only areas of my life in which I can be in complete control. Incorporating would mean paperwork, a board of directors, yearly meetings, voting—everything I mistrust. If I *had* to operate that way I'd quit publishing. It wouldn't be fun. It wouldn't be *mine*.

All of which, every time I think about it, only makes me more sure that government art grants are the most misguided idea since the electric spoon, for the simple reasons that: (a) they fund the wrong things; and (b) what really *deserves* funding doesn't *demand* funding.

Oh, there are all sorts of peripheral reasons why government grants are bad news: They discourage competition and self-reliance and weaken survival instincts among artists and render apathetic and cynical the general public, which might support the arts voluntarily (i.e., pay a fair price to enjoy what they enjoy) if they didn't see swarms of Cristos wrapping their garbage in hundreds of thousands of tax dollars every year.

But these complaints, I suppose, pale before the sad truth in the very *names* of the grantors: the National Endowment for "the Arts," state councils on "the arts." They aren't kidding: That's exactly where the money goes—to "the arts," not to artists. It goes to bring traveling troupes to town, to renovate old playhouses, to buy costumes for neighborhood Barrymores, to fund local orchestras. Some kinds of money can go to arts *administrators*, and some go to "artists in residence," often talented folk who spend their precious creative hours with third-graders because the schools don't want to hire art teachers and the artists can make more than $600 for a school week. The cash, in short, goes to *performances* of various kinds, but not to artists, the admitted elite, without whom there would be nothing to perform or look at or read. Some states do have fellowships for artists—as does the NEA, and hefty grants *those* are—but a few nice chunks of money to artists are only drops in the huge grants bucket.

Thus, the greater part of our tax-funded arts grants is wasted, sucked into some vacuum called "the arts," which holds vast audiences but no creators. And what isn't wasted—what goes to artists—is unnecessary. Because what our good legislators haven't discerned is that an artist will create whether he is paid or not.

The artistic portion of an artist's life is the same—hard, joyous, above all solitary—whether he lives with a cat in a New York walk-up or with a wife and four kids in a Peoria split-foyer. What he does, he does because he *must*. Most artists dream of making a good living from their art but don't mind masquerading as businesspeople from eight to five every day: They tell themselves it won't be forever; they remind themselves that the drudgery, the dullness, the bourgeois *job* gives them utter freedom, at night and on weekends, behind the locked door of their studio or study. If "free" money is available, they'll want some, of course—but if it isn't they'll carry on nonetheless: because they can't do otherwise; because their art is their joy. Artists can't be starved out of their art—or bought into it. (Come to think of it, the same is probably true of the amateur groups and professional troupes receiving most of the money.) Given a choice of unlimited money or unlimited freedom, most artists would choose freedom. cc

Jane Greer edits the famous Plains Poetry Journal.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Dr. Bob's Unusual University

Bob Jones University. Isn't that the segregationist place down in South Carolina someplace?

Well, yes and no; or, rather, no and yes. BJU is in Greenville, South Carolina. And it did lose its tax exemption not long ago because its administration—which means the Reverend Dr. Bob Jones Jr., son of the founder—forbids interracial dating on what it/he believes to be biblical grounds. But if Bob Jones is racist, in the strict sense of that much-misused word, it is hardly segregationist: it has a number of black students, and yellow ones and probably red ones, too. In an odd way, Bob Jones is a very cosmopolitan place.

Perhaps you never heard anything good about it, but there are circles, worldwide, in which it's regarded as not just a reputable school, but an outstanding one. Among those who share its brand of orthodoxy, it has an international reputation and international connections. Ian Paisley was an honored guest last summer at a World Congress of Fundamentalists, and its students come from all over for what it, almost uniquely, offers.

Bob Jones is, first and last, an institution dedicated to its founder's version of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity. It offers pretty much the usual range of postsecondary instruction, but within that framework. In one recruiting ad, for instance, a young graduate reports that her business degree and the Lord's blessing secured her a post with the largest bank in northeastern Alabama. Its education school seems to train teachers primarily for fundamentalist private academies (and its university press publishes an extensive line of textbooks for such schools). BJU also

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trains preachers of the Gospel, as understood by Dr. Bob, and it trains them well, by its own lights, offering courses even in "missionary aviation." BJU-trained missionaries—flying and earthbound—have extended the school's reputation to some of the least hospitable corners of the globe.

Bob Jones calls itself the "World's Most Unusual University" (its radio station is WMUU), and it may be right. Although it has a very Southern flavor to it, the school has little to do with the middle-sized Southern city in which it is located (and one gathers that both BJU and Greenville prefer it that way). Visitors are welcome, although they must pass a guardhouse at the entrance to campus. Smoking is forbidden, obviously. A discreet sign on the museum states that modest dress is required. (Fair enough: I've seen similar signs in Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods.)

When I visited Bob Jones one afternoon last winter, it was like stepping through a time warp, back to a 1957 that never really was. Although I was, as a matter of fact, in the company of an interracial couple (Caucasian-Oriental), I don't think we drew any disapproving glances on that score. But I was self-conscious for the first time in years about my modest crop of facial hair.

The dominant first impression of BJU students is one of healthy vigor: for boys, the muscular Christian mode; for girls, the perky style I always associate with cheerleaders. Closer examination reveals a pretty full complement of tubby late-adolescents and pimply ectomorphs, but these actual physical facts are effectively disguised by a stern dress code. Young men must wear coats and ties, often suits. Young women wear over-the-knee skirts that look weirdly sexy to anyone who was a teenaged boy 30 years ago. I am told—I hope it's true—that Bob Jones women were forbidden to wear makeup until that became a mark of the counterculture, whereupon they were required to wear it. I do know that BJU now offers instruction in "cosmetology."

All students of both sexes are earnest in appearance and restrained in demeanor. Many look like the kind who would tell you that they have nothing against good, clean fun. They look ready—even eager—to help the visitor with directions, physical or spiritual, or to explain why Billy Graham is a renegade. Surely some students are there grumpily, because their parents thought it would be good for them, but they cannot be detected on sight—and probably a good thing for them, too.

The school's campus is modern, not to say *moderne*—much of it in yellow brick, late art deco. It is intensively landscaped and largely maintained by students. Boys are allowed to wear blue jeans while gardening, although it looked to me as if few choose to do so.

The university is justly proud of its museum of religious art, twenty-odd rooms of it. Some of it is very fine indeed: we're not talking about Last Supper bedspreads here. All of the art is old and European, which is to say Papist. Some of the martyrs depicted look even less comfortable than usual, which I attribute to their incongruous setting. Ian Paisley must have been almost as pained himself at all the reliquaries and portraits of bishops.

The bookstore, nearby, offers the usual assortment of T-shirts, mugs (coffee, not beer), pennants, and souvenirs, as well as some Most Unusual books. One examines Satanism in rock music. Another, called *A Church Built on Sand*, condemns the liberalism of the Southern Baptist Convention. The cover shows a church (with a more than incidental similarity to the Southern Baptist church across the road from the BJU guardhouse) sinking into quicksand.

Across from the bookstore is another large building, with an enormous room on the second floor filled with dozens of sofas. It is used for "dating," which means sitting and conversing, under supervision. When I was there, a handwritten sign announced "No Dating Friday Afternoon." The room was empty.

In the same building is a state-of-the-art multimedia center (excuse the expression), which offers daily presentations for prospective students and donors. My friends and I were neither, but went anyway. The production (by the BJU media department) is very impressive, very flashy, very well thought-out. Like the aviation courses, it forcibly reminded me that BJU's attitude toward the 1980's is not simply adversarial. Bob Jones people are not rigid traditionalists like the Amish. Indeed, it may be a mistake to think of them as traditionalists at all. It takes a lot of money to run a show like this, for instance, and BJU obviously has it, even after taxes. A loyal constituency helps, of course, but so does modern management and the whole apparatus of modern marketing, direct mail, and all the rest. Old wine, perhaps, but very new bottles.

No, the school admits modernity, but wants it selectively, and on its own terms. It does seem to regard the outside world with considerable suspicion, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, there is something of a fortress atmosphere about BJU, and, for whatever reason, many outsiders profess to find the place somewhat frightening. The multimedia presentation has an odd emphasis on how efficient campus security is; across town, at (Southern Baptist) Furman University, the folklore among liberal faculty members has it that BJU is stockpiling arms.

I gather that the school did apply, unsuccessfully, for permission to arm its campus police with automatic weapons, and a conspiracy theorist might speculate about the connection between this alleged passion for weaponry and the school's links to the Protestants of Ulster.

It seems to me, though, that those who find BJU scary tend to be liberal Protestants, perhaps especially Baptists, who fear that they see in it the dark side of their own tradition. An outsider like me can look at it with a good deal more equanimity and, from a distance, I find it an interesting and colorful tile in the American mosaic. Up close, it is, at worst, unpleasant—and no more so than any other exclusivist sectarian community. Bob Jones poses no clear and present danger to constitutional government or civil disorder. Among its supporters, the rank and file, at least, are utterly sincere in their beliefs and give up a great deal in consequence. These are a stiff-necked people, and a peculiar one, but admirable in some ways.

I don't think they have the answer. But they're not the problem. cc

John Shelton Reed has been writing a book on Victorian Anglo-Catholicism for far too long.

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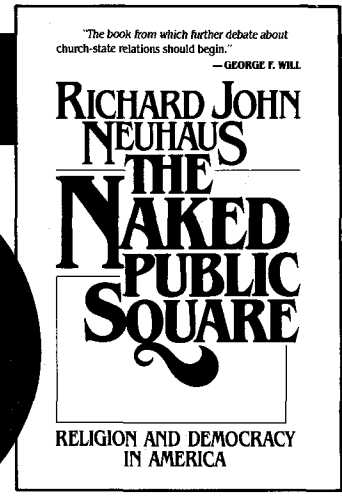
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